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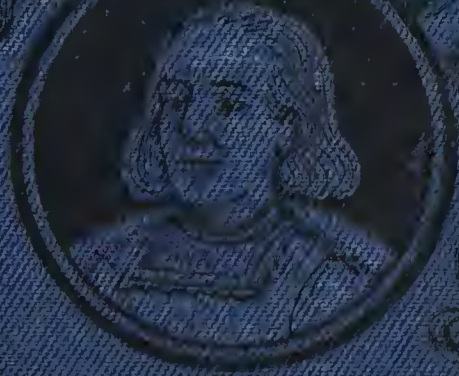

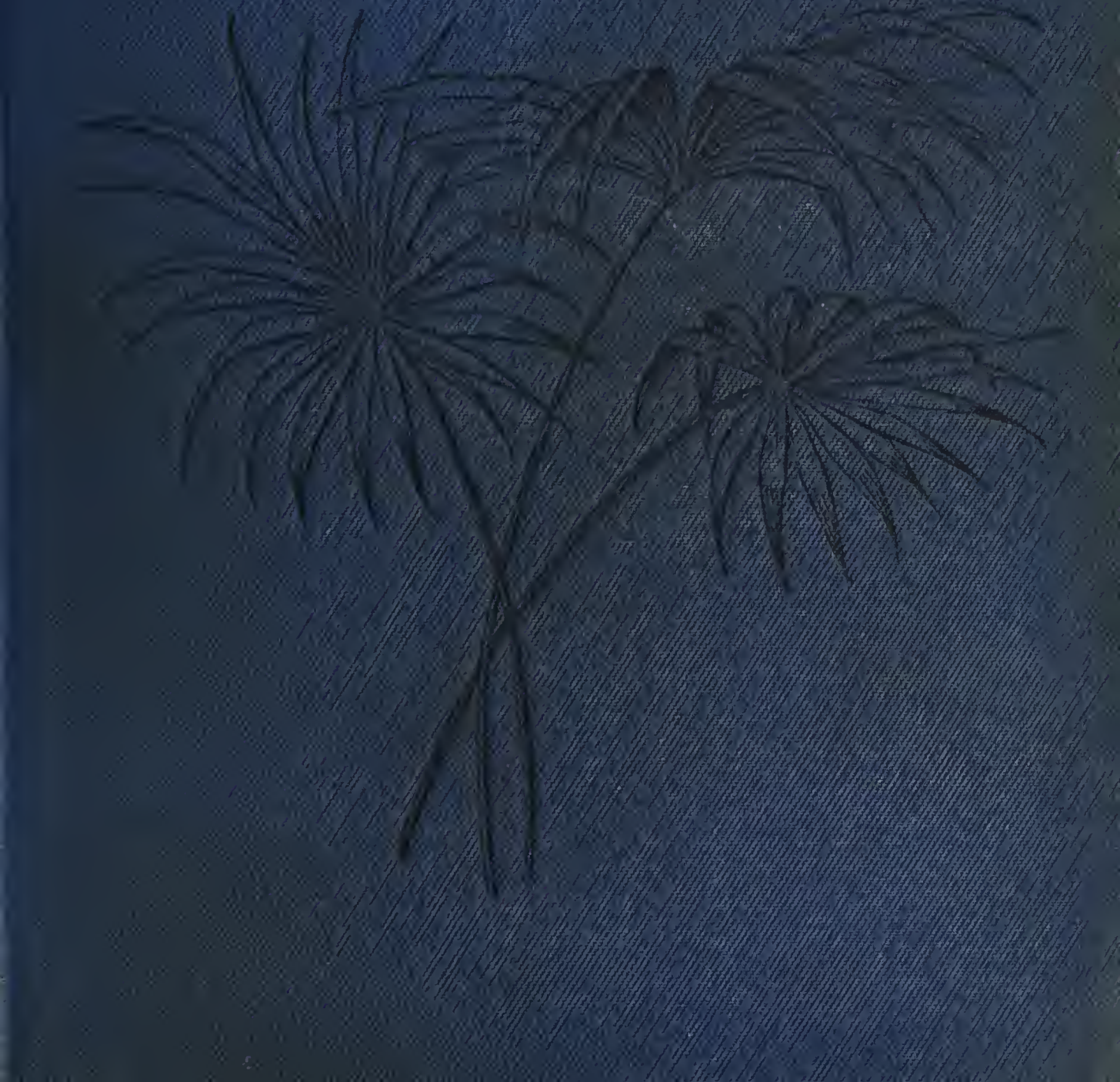

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A WIFE'S CRIME.

By MARY GRACE HALPINE.

UNIVERSITY OF ILL

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A WIFE'S CRIME.

By MARY GRACE HALPINE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MEETING BY THE RIVER.

It was a wild, lonely, romantic scene upon the Highlands, to which the shades of evening gave a gloomy, almost desolate look.

Down its steep, precipitous banks, the beautiful Hudson moved over its rocky bed, its soft murmur the only sound that broke the solemn stillness.

Suddenly a woman stole swiftly down a steep, narrow path which wound in and around the rocks and hills that arose to a great height in the background.

As, pausing, she glanced around with a timid, startled air, a man sprung from beneath the shadow of a tree in front of her.

"Oh! Geraldine, darling! how good, how very good you are not to disappoint me. I was beginning to fear that you were not coming."

For a few moments Geraldine lay unresistingly in the passionate embrace to which she was folded. Then releasing herself, with a shudder, she stood up.

The moon, which now broke from beneath a cloud, revealed the pale, beautiful face, and the midnight glory of the eyes that were turned mournfully upon the face of her companion.

"No, no! Antonio, do not call me that. I am a bad wife, a bad mother. But not irredeemably so—for I have come to bid you farewell forever."

"Geraldine!"

"Yes, forever. Listen to me, Antonio. When I first learned of the cruel deception that had been practiced upon me, upon us both, and which induced me to marry another, I went almost wild, and my indifference to my husband changed to loathing and almost hate. And when you wrote me entreating that I would give you one in-

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terview, I felt that I must see you, if only to tell you how innocent I was of wronging you. If it had only stopped there. But this is the third time we have met, and it must be the last."

"Geraldine, only listen to me, darling. The man you call husband not only knew but connived at this plot against our peace. It is he that is the interloper, not I; it is he that is wronging me, not I him. Have you forgotten the solemn vows you pledged me, and which made those you took at the altar a mockery and a lie?"

"But there is one thing that is neither a mockery nor a lie, Antonio. I am a mother. He who holds the place that should have been yours is the father of my children."

The simple dignity of these words, the pure, sweet look in the lifted eyes, evidently had an effect upon the man to whom they were spoken. Then a jealous pang pierced his heart.

"Is my happiness nothing to you? Do you love them better than me?"

"I should be unworthy of yours, or any honest man's love, were I unmindful of my duty to those who have so sacred a claim upon me, as, in your better moments, you would own. To do as you propose, would not make you happy. I know you better than you know yourself. You are not your right self now, no more than I have been mine. Shall I tell you what aroused me from my wild dream of madness and despair? It was such a simple thing, and yet so strong and resistless—the touch of my baby's dimpled hand upon my cheek, as I bent over the cradle where she lay. As I looked upon its innocent face, and thought that it might live to blush for the mother that bore her, I saw, for the first time, the fearful precipice upon which my feet were standing. Saw it not too late, thank God! It was wrong in me to meet you here, as I have done, wrong in me to listen to your professions of love, and the still stronger pleadings of my own heart. But there has been no actual guilt as yet, and there must be none. Do you love me, Antonio?"

"Do I love you, Geraldine? No man ever gave to woman a love more true and tender."

"Then do not urge me to a course that can only result in wretchedness to me, to you, and to my innocent children. Help me to be strong. We, that are forbidden to love on earth, can look forward to meeting in a better country, where we can love unblamed."

Antonio was silent for some moments, evidently a heavy struggle going on in his heart.

"Geraldine, as strong and passionate as my love is for you, it is not so selfish as you think. It is for your sake,

more than mine, that I wanted to take you away with me. I cannot bear the thought of leaving you in yonder gloomy prison-house, not only cut off from all society, but all aid and protection, and left to the mercy of a brutal tyrant, for disguise it as you may, your husband is nothing less. Nor are your brothers much better."

"They are worse," responded Geraldine, with a shudder. "I would sooner trust to my husband's mercy than to theirs. In one thing you wrong Mr. Bayard. I am convinced that my brothers never told him the true story of our betrothal, and that he had nothing to do with the deception practiced upon us both. He must have known that I had no love for him, however, and that I was frightened and threatened into marrying him. But though this knowledge did not deter him from carrying out his determination to make me his wife, it made him harsh and distrustful of me almost from the first. He broke open my desk one day, finding some of your letters there. Since this he has been almost insanely jealous. I tremble when I think what the result might be if he should know of our meetings. You must not come here again."

"Do you stay in this lonely place, Geraldine, all the year around, summer and winter?"

"Except once, when I visited my brother Petro's place, Wolf's Crag, and which is still more lonely and difficult of access, I have not left Hunter's Lodge for over two years. My husband is sometimes away months at a time. But I never know when to expect him back, as he always appears suddenly and without warning."

"My poor, dear love! what a hard, lonely life yours must be!"

"I do not mind that part of it. Since our cruel separation all places are alike to me. Do not fear for me, Antonio; the saddest life will end some time, and while my children are left me I cannot be utterly wretched. Should I lose them I think I should go wild."

A few more whispered words, a parting embrace, more tender because it was to be for all time, and the two separated.

With the same swift, noiseless step, Geraldine retraced her way to the steep, narrow path that led to Hunter's Lodge.

Built of rough gray stone, it looked more gloomy than usual, standing in the black shadow of the tall trees that surrounded it.

Avoiding the main entrance, she passed around to the side of it.

Pausing beneath the shadow of some vines that clambered up over a balcony, she glanced hurriedly around her,

her heart almost standing still with terror as she fancied she saw the dim outline of a form beneath an enormous tree in the rear.

Convinced, upon a closer view, that it was only a shadow of the tree itself, she looked up at the house, every window of which was shrouded in darkness, save the one over the balcony by which she stood, where a faint light glimmered.

The pillars that supported the balcony being built of blocks of rough stone of irregular size, it was not difficult for Geraldine, aided by the tough fibers of the vine that sent out its branches in every direction, to reach the top, and which brought her on a level with one of the deep, low windows of her own room.

Drawing the curtain across the window through which she stepped, Geraldine let the long, loose mantle drop from her shoulders.

Taking a candle from the mantel, she passed through the half-open door into the inner room, where a lovely boy of two and a sweet little baby girl were quietly sleeping.

Pausing by the couch where they lay, she pressed a kiss upon the rosy lips. Then returning to her own chamber, her head was soon lying upon the pillows of a low couch in one corner of it.

Wearied by her long walk and the excitement through which she had passed, she soon sank into a deep slumber.

She did not know how long she had slept, but it must have been several hours, when she was aroused by a heavy hand upon her wrist.

Opening her eyes, she shrieked with terror as they fell upon the man beside her bed and who was holding up a lantern, the light of which shone full upon herface.

A moment later, recognizing that pale, stern face, she faltered:

"Is it you, Robert? I—I—how you frightened me."

A bitter smile curled the thin lip.

"Yes, it is I—your husband—returned unexpectedly, to find how his wife has been amusing herself in his absence."

A nameless terror seized Geraldine as she looked into those gleaming eyes, and she made a furtive attempt to free herself from the iron grasp which closed around the delicate wrist still more tightly.

In the same tone of suppressed fury, Mr. Bayard continued:

"I have been standing here all of ten minutes, admiring the sweet, innocent look that a wife's face can wear who has returned from a midnight meeting with her lover—with his kiss still warm upon her lips."

"Robert——"

"Silence, woman! nor make your guilt still blacker by falsehood. *I saw you*, and will you deny it to my face?"

"I am not going to deny it. I have sinned, but not so deeply as you think. Were it a thousand times blacker, it would be as white as snow compared to the sin that has been committed against me. Ah, if I had only had the courage to have spoken to you before, to have implored your aid and protection. But, from the commencement of our ill-starred marriage, you have been so harsh and stern."

"Ill-starred. indeed," was the bitter response. "I curse the day that I ever looked upon your false and beautiful face!"

Geraldine shrank before that look, so stern and accusing, and yet so full of gloom and despair. Conscience began to make itself heard, though so faintly as scarcely to be audible.

There was a strange and indescribable sadness in Mr. Bayard's voice, as he continued:

"As God lives! man never gave to woman a love more strong and tender. Can you, *dare* you, look upon the man you have so foully wronged, and assert that I have always been harsh and stern? Can you not remember a time when I was very different from what I now am? I studied your every wish, in the vain hope of winning a smile, a look, such as you bestowed freely upon every chance-comer. I placed my heart beneath your feet, and you have trampled upon it from first to last, you have bestowed upon me such fond names as 'tyrant' and 'jailer.' Your words have come true, as you will find. But it is all *your* work; what I now am, *you* made me."

There was a tremor to Geraldine's voice, and a beseeching look in her eyes, as she said:

"Robert, my cruel brothers made me think that the man I loved was dead, else I had not married you. It is only within a year since that I learned he was living, as you know. I promised to be a good, true wife to you. And I meant, I tried——"

"And you have the assurance to tell *me* this, when I witnessed your interview with your lover, down by the river, scarcely four hours ago?"

"As God lives, who looks upon my heart, I went down there to bid him an eternal farewell."

A strange laugh burst from Bayard's lips, a laugh that had in it nothing of mirth or pleasure.

"And so you did—though you little meant that it should be so."

A nameless fear touched Geraldine's heart.

"What do you mean?"

"No matter; be patient, you'll know full soon enough."

Letting go of the wrist he had seized, and which bore the imprint of his fingers for days after, Bayard surveyed his wife for some moments in gloomy silence.

"What does that wife deserve who has deceived and sinned against her husband, as you have deceived and sinned against me?"

"In your eyes, death, I suppose. And I would much rather die than live, were it not for my children—*our* children. Oh, my husband, surely, oh, surely, there must be some touch of tenderness, of pity in your heart, for the mother of your children!"

These words, and that appealing look and tone, would have touched most any heart, but they seemed to add to the fury of the man to whom they were addressed.

He raised his clinched hand as though he would smite her to the floor, and then let it fall heavily upon a table by which he stood.

"Vilest of your sex!" he cried, hoarsely, "how dare you use such language to *me?* Will you add to the deadly wrong you have done me by endeavoring to foist the child of your paramour upon me? Lionel is my son, and I shall act a father's part by him by removing him forever from your influence. As to the other—the offspring of your guilty love—I utterly repudiate and disown it, even as I repudiate and disown you!"

Uttering a low cry of terror and dismay, the wretched woman threw herself down at the speaker's feet.

"Hear me, Robert—condemn me if you will—only hear me! I have erred, alas! alas! and sorely have I been punished. In my brief fit of madness and despair, I have given you just cause to reproach and distrust me, but this is all. I swear before Heaven that I am not guilty of the crime with which you charge me. Disown, repudiate me, but bring not down upon my innocent baby's head such a blighting shame as this—*your* baby."

With an imprecation too horrible to repeat, Bayard dragged Geraldine up from her knees, pushing her down into a chair.

"Infamous woman! never dare call that child mine again. You would swear that white was black and black white to suit your purpose, take a most solemn oath that you hadn't met your lover at all if I had not been eye-witness to your interview. Will you deny that less than a week ago you agreed to fly with this man to Italy? That you not only shamelessly avowed your love for him, but your loathing for me, your husband? It is here in your own handwriting; I took it from its resting-place over your dead lover's heart, after it had ceased to beat. See! it is red with his life-blood!"

The light from the lantern fell full upon the letter that Bayard held up, revealing clearly the crimson stains upon it.

For some moments Geraldine gazed bewildered into those fiercely exultant eyes. Then, as the horrible import of these words dawned upon her, with a sharp and bitter cry, like the wail of a breaking heart, she fell forward upon her face.

CHAPTER II.

A HARD CHOICE.

WHEN Geraldine aroused from that death-like faint, she found herself lying upon a low bed in a place so strange and unfamiliar that, at first, she felt that she must be under the influence of some horrible dream.

The mist slowly clearing from her brain, she lifted her head, and looked around.

It was evidently some place under ground, or partially so.

The gray dawn was stealing through a deep, narrow window near the top, and which was strongly guarded by iron bars.

As dim as this light was, she soon became sufficiently accustomed to it to be able to take a survey of her new and strange quarters.

The place was square, or nearly so, built of heavy stones, whose solid masonry seemed to defy any attempt to dislodge them, looking like some prison-house or tomb. A shudder ran through her veins, as she thought that it might be, to her, both.

Her mind slowly traveled back to the time that she lost consciousness, when, holding up the letter, with its blood-red stains, her husband had spoken those terrible words, which even now rang through her brain.

A deadly sickness came over her. Those words, that blood-stained letter, could bear only one import—only one.

The man she loved, and who loved her, as, in all her sorrowful life, no other had, had been most foully dealt with—and because he loved her.

He had been followed, and struck down by the cowardly hand of an assassin.

She recalled the words he had spoken, that he was the wronged, not the wronger, and her heart acknowledged their truth.

Oh! that the hate and loathing that surged through every vein would only nerve her weak woman's hand to take vengeance on his murderer!

As Geraldine looked upon the rough stones of her prison-house, a strong impulse came over her to dash her head

against them, and thus escape the maddening thoughts, whose accumulated agony was more than she could bear.

When her cruel tyrant came, she would defy him, telling him to finish the work he had commenced, by giving her the same fate—all that earth could give her now—the hope of rejoining him.

Then came the thought of her helpless children. How could she leave them, especially her baby, and to such cruel hands?

All the mother in her revolted at the bare suggestion.

No! no! for their sakes she must temporize with the man who held their fate, as well as hers, in his hands.

Rising, she groped around the room, hoping to find some loose stone or aperture in the wall, but without avail.

Though it was a warm day in the early fall, there was such a damp chilliness in the air and on everything upon which her hands and feet rested that she was glad to creep back to the rude straw bed that afforded her some protection from it.

Upon one of the flat stones with which the floor was paved was a pitcher of water and a loaf of bread.

Though she felt no inclination for food or drink, she partook sparingly of both, well knowing that she would have occasion for all the strength and courage she could command.

The letter that was in her husband's possession had been written not long after her discovery of the means that had been used to induce her to marry him, and when she had been nearly beside herself with grief and indignation. And, as she recalled some allusions in it to her husband, her knowledge of his character and disposition, she felt that it was something that he would neither forget nor forgive.

Occupied by these and other quite as gloomy fears and conjectures, the long hours dragged their slow length along, and the light began to vanish from the narrow grated window, adding darkness to the gloom of her dreary surroundings.

Thus far not a sound had broken the oppressive stillness, and she well knew that any outcry she might make would be unheeded if heard.

The unhappy wife had long known that the few servants at Hunter's Lodge were creatures of her husband, employed to watch and spy upon rather than to minister to her comfort.

As poor Geraldine watched the last faint ray of light disappear, leaving her in utter darkness, she recalled the many instances she had read of people being incarcerated

in a place like this, with a pitcher of water and a loaf of bread, and left to slow starvation.

Was this to be *her* fate?

Was this the punishment meted out to her by the cruel heart that was so hard and bitter against her—that seemed determined to show no mercy to the temporary folly and weakness to which she had been driven?

As these thoughts passed through Geraldine's mind, she heard the sound of a step, followed by the harsh turning of the key in the rusty lock.

A moment later the ponderous door swung open, and her husband entered.

The darkness had been so intense and long-continued, that Geraldine involuntarily shielded her eyes from the light that that uplifted lantern flashed into them.

Misinterpreting this, Bayard said:

"No wonder that you shrink from the eye of the man you have so basely injured, your loathed and hated husband."

The flashing eyes that were now turned upon the speaker certainly had no fear in their steady gaze.

"*Murderer!*—never hated and loathed as now—have you come to gloat upon my wretchedness, or make an end to it, which?—Strike, if you will, only let your aim be true and your hand steady."

"I am no murderer. For what I have done—and which I would do a thousand times over were it necessary—there is not a court in Christendom but what would hold me guiltless. Were you not the mother of my son you should share the same fate."

Tears quenched the fierce light in Geraldine's eyes. The allusion in the last sentence had touched a chord that vibrated through her whole being.

"And if I were not a mother, I would consider it the greatest boon you could grant. For the sake of my children I would live, though every breath be drawn in agony. For their sakes, I humble myself to implore your mercy. There can be no more peace between us two, Robert. You have pre-judged and condemned me, placed the worst possible construction upon my folly and weakness, and, even if I could overlook and forget the past, you never will. Give me my baby, the child you so causelessly disowned, and the barest means of living, and I will go where you will never be troubled by us again."

Here the speaker's voice, broken by sobs, ended in a moan.

Bayard gazed upon the pale face, over which the tears were streaming fast, apparently unmoved by all he saw there.

"You shall never step outside these walls, or look upon your child's face, unless you sign this paper."

Taking a paper that her husband handed her Geraldine ran her eyes over its contents.

"Just Heaven!" she cried, letting it fall from her trembling hands, "sign a paper that declares my own infamy and brands my child as illegitimate? Never! never!"

Picking up the paper which had fluttered to the floor, Bayard said:

"Then you shall not only never leave this place alive, but both your children shall be taught to detest and scorn your memory. Your son shall be taught to regard you as too vile for him to call himself such, and your daughter trained to consider you as the hated cause of the inheritance of shame that will be hers."

The speaker turned toward the door. Springing to her feet, Geraldine seized his arm with a convulsive grasp.

"Stay! Ah, God, what have I done that I should be tortured so remorselessly? If I sign this paper will you give me my baby and let me go?"

"If you sign it, so far as I am concerned, you can take the child and go where you will."

"Give me the paper."

Again did this unhappy lady read the confession of her guilt, every word of which seemed stamped in burning characters upon her brain.

"I call God to witness that it is a lie!" she cried, raising her streaming eyes upward. "As black as the black heart that coined it!"

"Your language is not over complimentary," responded Bayard, coolly. "But no matter about that. Put your name there."

Grasping the pen that was placed in her hand, Geraldine affixed her name hurriedly to the paper, as if she feared that she should lack courage to do so if she paused to think.

"It is done!" she cried, dashing the pen to the earth. "But I charge you to remember that it is done under protest; that I declare my entire innocence of the crime of which this paper declares me guilty."

"Never fear; I have a very good memory, as you will find."

Geraldine arose to her feet.

"Now open my prison door. Give me my baby and let me go."

"All in good time, madam. All that I have promised I shall perform to the letter, but there is no especial hurry that I'm aware of. It will do you no harm to have a few

more hours for solitude and reflection. To-morrow morning will be quite soon enough, I think."

Bayard turned toward the door as he said this.

Pressing one hand to her rapidly-beating heart, Geraldine stretched out the other toward him.

"One thing further," she faltered. "Lionel, my boy. You will let me see him once more, though it be only to bid him an eternal farewell?"

"He that you call your boy, but who is your boy no longer, is a good many miles away by this time. However uncertain your future fate may, in some respects, be, one thing you may be sure of, that you will never look upon his face again!"

Uttering these cruel words, and which fell like a blow upon the heart of the wretched mother, Bayard passed out.

The door swung to with a heavy clang, and Geraldine was alone.

CHAPTER III.

A TERRIBLE DEED.

THE longer Geraldine reflected, the more she was convinced that she was still at Hunter's Lodge.

She remembered hearing that it had been originally built by an eccentric old man, who had a son, wholly vicious and partly insane.

There had been strange rumors in regard to the latter. That he had once attempted, and nearly succeeded in taking his father's life, and that ever after he had been incarcerated in some cell under ground.

That she was in that cell, she entertained no doubt whatever.

And that she would never leave it without the consent of the man who placed her there, she was equally as sure.

Now that she had time to think the matter over calmly, she began to fear that she had acted unwisely in signing the papers.

It was a terrible thing to go out to the world.

And what if she had made this sacrifice vainly?—if her husband failed to keep his promise?

Then remembering that, however harsh and cruel he might be, he was a man that always prided himself on keeping his word, she drove the suspicion from her mind.

Wearied by these fears, conjectures and forebodings, toward morning Geraldine fell into an uneasy slumber.

She was aroused by the harsh grating of the lock, and the sudden clang that followed.

Springing to her feet, she saw, by the faint light that

streamed through the barred window, her husband standing by the door, with some garments over his arm.

With an eager look Geraldine turned toward him.

"You have come to take me away from this horrible place—to give me my baby. All night I have seemed to hear its wailing cry for me. It was never away from me a day before."

"It is your own work that you are separated from her now, and may be always."

"Always?" faltered the poor mother. "Oh! surely, surely, Robert, you will not be so cruel, so dishonorable, as to break your promise?"

"I shall keep it to the letter. What I said was, that so far as *I* was concerned, you could take your baby and go whither you would."

Geraldine looked bewildered into the speaker's face.

"And who else can it concern?"

"Your brothers."

"Merciful Father!"

Entirely disregarding the piercing anguish in these words, Bayard continued:

"I took you from them, and shall return you to them. Laying your confession and letter before them, I shall leave them to deal with you as they see fit."

Uttering a low cry of mortal terror, Geraldine flung herself upon the damp stones at the speaker's feet.

"No! no! Anything—anything but that! Hard and cruel as your heart is, I would sooner trust your mercy than theirs. As a child, I lived in terror of them, trembling at the sound of their voices and footsteps. They were ever hard and severe to my most trifling faults, and I know only too well how they will judge me now. Sensitive and proud as to their name and honor, they will never forgive the reproach I have brought upon both."

With the same stern, immovable face, Bayard disengaged himself from the hands that clung to his knees

"As I told you, I shall leave your fate entirely to your brothers. All you have to decide is, whether you will go to them, or have me summon them hither. I advise you to choose the former. If you do, dress quickly, as the carriage will be at the door in half an hour."

Pointing to the garments that he had tossed upon the bed, Bayard left the room.

With her forehead pressed closely to the cold, damp stones upon which she lay, Geraldine battled silently with the despairing and maddening thoughts that rushed over her.

Hearing the returning steps she had learned to know so well, she sprung to her feet.

As she did so, her eye fell upon a loose, rough stone, several pounds in weight.

Seizing it with both hands, she stationed herself on a wooden bench back of the door.

As it swung back, the desperate and maddened woman sprung forward, the stone in her hands falling heavily on the top of Bayard's head, who, uttering a faint moan, sunk to the ground.

But he was evidently only stunned; for in a few moments he opened his eyes.

On perceiving the form standing over him with the uplifted stone in her hands, a wild plea for mercy trembled upon his lips.

But she, who had been shown no mercy, showed none.

Again the stone descended, this time upon the temple; and with another moan the head fell back.

For some moments Geraldine stood there, ready, at the slightest movement, to repeat the blow.

But there was none; a leaden pallor overspreading the face, save where the blood trickled from the temple, giving it a still more ghastly aspect.

A sudden revulsion coming over her, the stone dropped from her trembling hands.

As she looked down upon it, red with the horrible work it had done, a shudder convulsed her frame.

"Ah! God," she moaned, "and has it come to this? Am I a murderess—the murderess of the father of my dear babies? It is, it must be, some horrible dream, from which I shall soon awaken."

And flinging herself down by that cold, motionless form, the wretched woman felt that she would gladly yield her own life to bring back that she had taken.

Then other and sterner thoughts came over her.

If she would escape, there must be no delay; if she would gain possession of her child, it must be now or never.

Quickly attiring herself in the garments that had been brought her, Geraldine took the key from the fast-stiffening hand, and passed out, locking the door after her.

Here she found herself in a narrow, dimly lighted passage, which, after various crooks and turnings, led her to a steep, rude stairway.

This evidently leading to the upper world, Geraldine paused, listening intently for some moments.

Not a sound was audible; and knowing that it was very early for the servants to be astir, creeping softly up the stairs, she looked cautiously around.

To her great relief there was no one visible.

Remembering her husband's words about the carriage being at the door, she was not sorry to find herself in the

back part of the house, and which was quite remote from the main entrance.

The house being much larger than was needed, this part of it was not used, but having wandered over it in some of her many lonely, restless moods, it was sufficiently familiar to her for her to be able to tell pretty clearly what course to take to reach her own apartments.

Ascending some winding stairs, and passing through various corridors and empty rooms, Geraldine came to a wide hall. whose familiar aspect made her pause.

As she did so, the wailing cry of a babe smote upon her ear.

A moment later, she heard the harsh, irritated voice of the hired nurse, trying to hush it.

Controlling the strong impulse to rush forward and snatch it from her arms, Geraldine pushed open a door that was ajar and walked noiselessly in.

It was her own room, the nursery being adjoining.

Through the half-open door came the plaintive wail that appealed so strongly to the mother's heart.

Again that harsh voice grated upon her ear.

"Whist, ye little divil, or I'll give ye somethin' to screech fur! It's nothin' but crossness that ails ye. Sorra bit of slape have I had wid ye the night."

A few moments later the speaker stood in the open doorway.

"Howly Vargin! the saints defind us!" she cried, as her eyes fell upon Geraldine.

Laying aside her hat, as though she had just come in from some journey, Geraldine turned her eyes serenely upon that frightened face.

"I am Mrs. Bayard. You are the new nurse, I suppose!"

"Misthress Bayard, is it? Sure an' I niver knew there was any sech. The masther niver towld me that——"

"You know now," interrupted Geraldine, a little haughtily. "I hear the baby crying; bring it to me."

Awed by that look and tone, the woman obeyed.

If she had had any doubts as to Geraldine's identity, they vanished as she saw how eagerly the babe sprung to its mother's arms.

A feeling akin to rapture filled Geraldine's heart as she pressed the little creature to her bosom.

"Oh, my babe, my babe!" she thought. "I have dared and suffered much to get thee back to my arms. Heaven pity those who would seek to tear thee from them again!"

The little Isabel was a most lovely child, with the same dark eyes and jetty hair that distinguished her beautiful mother.

Soothed by the encircling arms, the loving voice she knew so well, the child fell into a tranquil slumber.

"Bless the darlint!" ejaculated Bridget Connor, in quite another tone and strain from that she had used before. "Sure, an' that is jest what it was cryin' an' frettin' fur. I couldn't plaze it, do what I wud. One cud see with half an eye that it's your child, ma'am. Ye are as alike as two pays, barrin' there's a bit of the father about the mouth."

Shuddering at this allusion, Geraldine went into the nursery, and laying the child in the crib, stood looking down upon it.

She had never thought Isabel like her husband, but as she gazed she could see that there was, as the girl had stated, something of the father around the mouth. The father she had mur—— Ah, God! how could she repeat the horrible word, or be again what she had been?

There was a strange fascination about the sweet baby-mouth, so that she could not withdraw her eyes from it.

As she gazed, there floated before her mental vision another face, so white and ghastly; lips—so like, and yet so unlike—from which had burst that agonizing plea for mercy.

Ah! if she had only heeded it. But she was maddened with grief and despair.

With a deathly sickness at her heart, Geraldine staggered, rather than walked, into the adjoining room, which Bridget was engaged in tidying.

"The saints be betune us an' harm!" was that individual's pious ejaculation, as she turned round, "it's as white as a shate ye are. An', good fathers! what's that upon yer arm?"

In raising her hand to her forehead the loose sleeve had fallen back from the arm, disclosing a dark red stain upon its clear, white surface.

As Geraldine glanced down upon it, missing the chair that Bridget had wheeled forward, she slid downward to the floor.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD PRUE.

BELIEVING that her mistress was suffering from some wound or hurt, after laying her on the bed, Bridget directed her chief attention to the crimson stain upon her arm.

To her no small astonishment, however, the water of which she made such a lavish use in trying to restore her caused it to entirely disappear without leaving a trace behind.

"Sure, an' there isn't the laste scratch," she said, as Geraldine opened her eyes. "I thought you was hurted. It's mighty quare, so it is."

Then, observing for the first time the discolored marks upon the wrist, which its delicacy of color and outline made so distinctly visible, she gave it a careful examination, but as it was upon the other arm, it only served to increase her perplexity.

Perceiving the danger of allowing the girl's thoughts to run in this direction, forcing a smile to her colorless lips, Geraldine said:

"I am not hurt, my good girl; I was a little faint from over-fatigue, that is all. I am quite recovered now."

Bridget shook her head dubiously.

"Yer lookin' mighty white, onyway. Ye'd better let me go an' bring the masther. I heard him up an' stirrin' at daybreak."

The face of the guilty wife grew whiter yet with the deadly apprehension at her heart.

"No! no!" she said, hurriedly.

Then, a moment later:

"Mr. Bayard is away. He won't be back again for—for some time. Give me some wine from the decanter that you will find on the sideboard. Then darken the room, and I will try to sleep."

The girl did as she was bidden, and then, perceiving from Geraldine's closed eyes that she was sleeping, or trying to do so, left the room.

It is said that criminals, after a certain point, will sleep upon the rack, exhausted nature seeking a brief respite in forgetfulness and oblivion.

Certain it is that Geraldine, in spite of the horrors of the past, the perils that still menaced her, now fell into a deep, almost death-like, slumber.

She slept several hours, awakening with the heavy weight upon her heart experienced by those whose sleep is due to the exhaustion occasioned by some sharp and prolonged sorrow.

On going to the mirror to arrange her hair, Geraldine started back at the reflection there. So pale, so haggard and strange did it look, that it hardly seemed like hers.

One would suppose that ten years had passed over her head since she last stood there.

At this moment Bridget opened the door and looked in.

"An' so it's waked up, ye are? Sure, an' it's a foine sleep ye've had, though it's not much the bether ye are lookin' for it. Ye'll fale the good effects after ye've had somethin' to ate, I'm thinkin'."

"I think I shall," responded Geraldine, with a faint

smile. "I hope you have something for my dinner that is nice and nourishing."

"Indade, an' I have, thin. Briled chicken an' baked pataties, smokin' hot; lettin' alone the swate biscakes an' pudden. It's a dinner fit fur a quane. Will ye have it now, or wait a bit?"

"You can bring it in as soon as it is ready."

This Bridget did, who seemed to be good-natured, so far as she knew, and not at all sorry that there was to be a "misthress to the fore," as she expressed it.

Setting down the tray, she took the baby from Geraldine's arms.

"You needn't go," said the latter. "Stay here; I want to talk to you."

No ways disinclined to what was likely to give her opportunity for some use of her tongue, Bridget obeyed.

"I don't think I know your name yet?"

"Bridget Connor's me name, ma'am."

"You haven't been here a great while, Bridget?"

"I came yisterday noon. An' manin' no offense, ma'am, it's a month it sames. If the masther hadn't offered to double me wages, I wouldn't have coom at all at all. Such a lonesome, out-of-the-way place as it is, wid nobody to spake a word to but the naygur in the kitchen, who's as crass as two sticks, even if I'd demane mesilf by makin' frinds with the likes of her."

"Did you come before Lionel, my little boy, went away?"

Bridget looked a little surprised at this query.

"A little b'ye was tuck away jist afther. I mind now that was what they called him. Was it your b'ye, ma'am? But now I look at ye, I needn't ask, fur he had jist your hair an' eyes, barrin' his chakes was like two roses, an' yours is as white as the wall, jist."

"Did he go with his father?"

"No; 'twas the hired man that tuck him. Rattle, or some such name, they called him. I mind now seein' thim put the b'ye in the carriage, an' how the poor little crathur kept sobbin' an' cryin' fur his mother."

As obtuse as the girl's perceptions were, there was something in that look of agony, brief as it was, that struck strangely upon her.

"Sure, an' he didn't go unbeknownst to ye, ma'am?"

"Of course not," was the sharp rejoinder. "What a ridiculous question!"

Then in a gentle, conciliatory tone:

"It's all right his going to—to—— Strange I can't remember the name of the place."

"I didn't hear 'em say where it was, ma'am," said

Bridget, in response to the inquiring look fixed so eagerly upon her. "The man that tuck him away, him they called Rattle, didn't look as if he cud give a civil answer, if he thried, an' I asked no questions. Him an' the nagur is of one piece, I'm thinkin'. Both on 'em wud get their walkin' tickets mighty sudden if I was to the fore."

Without appearing to notice the hint conveyed by these words, Geraldine said:

"You looked very much astonished when you saw me."

"Indade an' I was, ma'am. Whin I see ye standin' in the middle of the flure, jist as if ye belonged there, it give me sech a turn as I hain't got over yet."

"And so I did belong there," was the quick response. "No one has so good a right to be here as I."

"Av coorse. Sure, an' that's aisy seen. But manin' no offinse, ma'am, I can't help thinkin' it's mighty quare that the masther didn't let fall a word as to how I was to expect ye."

"You don't mean to say, Bridget," said Geraldine, with a constrained laugh, "that Mr. Bayard told you he had no wife?"

This question was evidently something of a puzzler to the honest but rather obtuse mind to which it was directed.

"No, ma'am, I can't say that. Sure, an' I knew he had a wife once, because of the childer. I don't mind now jist what he did say, but he give me the impression that she was aither dead or gone off, niver to come back again."

"You must have misunderstood him," smiled Geraldine. "Mr. Bayard is a little peculiar, perhaps, to those who don't know him, but he couldn't have meant that."

"Faith an' I suppose he couldn't," said Bridget, rubbing her forehead with her forefinger, as though clearing away some mental cobwebs. "It don't look much like it anyway to see you settin' there so much at home, an' the baby a-smilin' an' cooin' at ye, as though she niver saw the likes av ye, bliss her! An' I'm not sorry for that same aither. As thrue as ye are settin' there if ye hadn't coom I wouldn't have stayed the wake out. No, not for double me wages, twice over."

"And I am glad that you are here, too," smiled Geraldine. "I hope you'll stay as long as I do."

"It's mesilf that hopes it won't be long, thin. One might be sort of contínted in warm weather, when you can get out av dures, but it must be lonesome enough in winter. Sure, an' ye don't mane to stay here, thin?"

"I don't think I shall be here through the winter," said Geraldine, a little gravely, as the query arose in her mind as to where she would be then.

Taking the baby from Bridget's arms, Geraldine bid her

remove the tray, and bring her some crackers and a glass of new milk; the little creature manifested every indication of joy and eagerness at an order she well knew was for her express benefit.

"Does Isabel want some crackers and nice new milk?" said the fond mother, kissing the little fluttering hands and sweet dimpled mouth.

Bridget was not long in executing this order.

Setting the tray down before her mistress, she said:

"The carriage that ye come in is still at the dure, ma'am. The horses will be nigh about aiten up by the flies, poor bastes!"

Geraldine mused a little before she replied:

"The hired man being away, there is no one to put them in the stable, I suppose?"

"The masther might, if he was here. But he's gone, ye say?"

"He is gone."

As Geraldine said this, she hid her face among the clustering curls of the child that was prattling on her knee, which perhaps, was what made her voice sound so strange and hollow.

"I towled the cook what ye said, ma'am, an' she was as imperdant as ye plase. She said, 'it was little you knew about it.' If I was to the fore, I'd send her kitin'. I'd sooner do the bit of cookin' ye made, mesilf, than be bothered wid the likes av her."

Geraldine listened to these words with a heart that was evidently ill at ease.

"I wouldn't mind what old Prue says, Bridget, nor talk much with her any way. She has her cross days, and I suppose this is one of them. I am sorry about the horses, though. They are very gentle, and when baby is asleep, we'll see if we can't put them up ourselves."

"Indade, an' ye'll do no sech thing, ma'am. I'll do it mesilf, an' wid no help from onybody. Many's the time I've harnessed an' unharnessed 'em in the ould counthry. An' I'd done it before if the nagur hadn't dared me to tech 'em. Whin I wint down to the kitchen for the milk an' crackers, I sez to her:

"'There's the carriage still at the dure that the misthress coom in, an' the poor bastes nigh aboot dead with the hate an' flies.'

"Wid that she pricked up her ears, lookin' at me rale sharp.

"'Did madam,' manin' you, ma'am, 'say that she coom in the carriage?' sez she.

"'Indade an' she did,' sez I.

"'Then she's a liar,' sez she.

"Beggin yer pardon fur repatin' it, but that be the very words, ma'am."

Rocking the baby to and fro, that she was lulling to sleep upon her breast, Geraldine's thoughts were busy with the new peril that menaced her.

She knew what old Prue was. Strongly attached to her husband, whose nurse she had been in his babyhood, she had always manifested quite as strong a dislike and suspicion of her from the first of their acquaintance.

Anxious to ascertain what the old woman suspected, if anything, she said:

"How did she think I came?"

"'That's jist what I said to her, ma'am. 'An' how wud she coom, on fut an' alone?' sez I.

"'That's best known to hersilf,' sez she.

"An' not another word cud I get out av her, good or bad. Save whin I mintioned that I cud put the bastes in the stable mesilf. Thin she flew into a towrin' rage, declarin' that Masther Robert put 'em there, an' they shouldn't be teched by nobody till he coom."

Entering the nursery, Geraldine laid the sleeping babe in its crib.

"I think the horses had better be put up," she said to Bridget, who had followed. "I will go with you. I don't think Prue will say anything to you if I am there. If she should, don't answer her. You see, she is Mr. Bayard's old nurse, not only taking care of him when a child, but serving him faithfully ever since; so she naturally takes more liberty than she otherwise would, especially where he is concerned. She never liked me."

"That's mighty quare," responded Bridget, her eyes resting with a look of honest admiration on the pale but lovely face of her mistress, to whom she had taken a strong liking. "Sure an' a body wudn't think she cud help it, if she thried. It's too good-natured ye are. It's me belafe that to be tuck down a peg or two wudn't do her ony harm. You naden't have ony fear of me, ma'am. I won't spake a word, or aven look at her."

Without any further words, the strong-armed, willing-hearted girl stood beside the restive creatures, patting the arched and shining necks, that were evidently glad enough to get freed from the post to which they were tied.

Catching a glimpse of what was going on from the broad window-seat where she was sitting, Prue sprung out upon the porch, evidently ready for battle.

"See here, you! you'd better let them hosses be! Marse Robert wants to use 'em."

Bridget made no reply, and Geraldine now coming down the steps into view, Prue said no more, but stood leaning

against one of the pillars of the porch, watching the proceedings in sullen silence.

She was a woman of about fifty, of the most pronounced African type, as her woolly locks and jet-black skin testified.

She was not wanting in the shrewdness peculiar to such, nor yet in native kindliness of heart, where she "took." But she never had taken to her master's wife. There had been mutual distrust and aversion between the two from the first, and which recent events had not served to lessen.

Bridget had gone with the carriage to the stable, and slowly and wearily Geraldine ascended the steps, and which brought her near the place where Prue stood.

Under the circumstance, anxious to conciliate rather than irritate, Geraldine greeted her pleasantly as she approached.

Prue made no response to this either by word or look.

"That 'ar gal say"—with a waving of the long, lank arm toward the carriage-road—"that you say Marse Robert gone?"

Startled by this abrupt query, Geraldine paused.

"That is precisely what I did say."

"Where?"

However Geraldine might have felt, she met unflinchingly those keen, questioning eyes.

"Why do you ask *me?* You know more of Mr. Bayard's comings and goings than I do."

"So I allers did," muttered the old woman. "An' that's why I think so strange now."

Geraldine moved a step forward, and then turned back.

"You can tell me where my boy, Lionel, has gone at all events?"

The old woman's eyes lighted up like a half-extinguished coal of fire.

She raised her arm with a half-threatening, half-triumphant gesture.

"Ay, that I can. He's gone where you won't see him, never ag'in!"

CHAPTER V.

NEW FEARS AND PERILS.

THOUGH Geraldine heard Prue's threat with cold, impassive face, deigning no reply to it, it fell heavy on her heart.

Her boy, her noble and beautiful boy! was she never to see him again?

It was in the hope of obtaining some clew to his where

abouts that she still lingered at a place rendered hateful by such horrible associations, and where the perils thickened round her steps hourly.

But for this she would take her only remaining child and flee, putting as many miles between them and Hunter's Lodge as possible. But while the faintest hope remained, she felt that she could not do this.

It was evident that the only way to this knowledge lay through the man who had taken him away; and her heart was divided between impatience for his return and terror at the questions and suspicions on his part, to which her husband's sudden and unexplained absence could not fail to give rise.

This man had been in Mr. Bayard's employ for several years, having, when a lad, by some famous encounter and victory over his namesake, obtained the *sobriquet* of Rattlesnake Jim, and which, in the process of time, had been shortened into "Rattle."

He had attached himself to his master's service with an almost dog-like fidelity and affection, and though he had neither the strong prejudices nor excitable temperament of Prue, he had almost as strong a dislike and suspicion of Geraldine. It was something to which he rarely gave expression, but Geraldine was not ignorant of it.

Feeling that they disliked her, she had taken no pains to ingratiate herself with them; receiving the grudging service they rendered her with haughty indifference.

Perhaps, in the strange and terrible position in which she was now placed, she wished that she had taken some pains to conciliate them. Certain it is, that often the thought of her lonely and unprotected situation struck terror to her soul.

The following morning Geraldine passed by the pantry window where old Prue was kneading bread.

"Good morning, Prue."

Prue had always returned ungraciously, as if under protest, any greeting from her mistress; she now gave her a darker look than usual, proceeding to bring down some baking-tins from a high shelf with a clatter and energy entirely disproportioned to the occasion.

"*Good*-morning—when Marse Robert gone, nobody know where? It may be to *you*. I dessay 'tis."

Believing it to be the best policy to ignore the insinuation conveyed by these words, Geraldine said:

"When is Rattle coming back?"

"*He's* comin' back, *Rattle* is, never you mind when," responded the old woman, still more darkly.

Geraldine elevated her eye-brows, with a look compounded of surprise and impatience.

"I suppose he is; at least I hope so."

It being a settled conviction of Prue's that her mistress was, as she expressed it, "a snake in the grass," seldom saying what she meant or meaning what she said, she shook her head doubtfully.

"P'r'aps you do. I dun know."

Then, her mind traveling in the same weary track, she added:

"Marse Robert didn't go with *him*. Mebby he went after?"

The speaker fixed her eyes sharply and inquiringly upon Geraldine's face, as if more anxious to get the expression there than any verbal reply.

But anxious as Geraldine was to give Prue some satisfactory reason for her husband's absence, she saw plainly that Rattle's return, which might occur at any moment, would upset any such theory as this.

"No, Prue," she said, with an appearance of great candor, "I don't think Mr. Bayard went with him."

For some moments these two—so widely different in appearance and position—stood there, as if each was trying to read the soul of the other.

Geraldine was the first to speak.

"It is not an unusual thing for Mr. Bayard to be absent, Prue—in fact, it has been of late quite an unusual thing for him not to be—why do you feel so worried about him now?"

The old woman lifted her long dark forefinger, her gleaming eyes and black, wrinkled face making her look not unlike one of the avenging Furies.

"I know, and so do *you*."

Geraldine's face paled a little—with all her self-control she could not help that—but, recovering herself almost instantly, she passed on with her usually slow, stately step.

But as she reached the solitude of her own chamber a cold perspiration burst from the pale face, accompanied by a stricture around the throat, as though she already felt the hangman's halter there.

That ghastly thing that was lying down there, hidden from every eye save one, would it ever be dragged forth to accuse her?

How much did this horrible old woman know?

That she knew of her recent trouble with her husband, that she suspected that she had some hand in his disappearance, this was certain; but did she know of her incarceration in the dungeon below?

If so, the connection between her appearance and his

disappearance would make the finding of the body only a matter of time.

She knew Prue's dislike of her, her fidelity and attachment to her master, the blood-hound ferocity with which she would hunt down his murderer.

Ought she not to flee now, while there was time?

"Was it not madness in her to defer it in the vague hope that she could induce Rattle to betray her boy's hiding-place?

She knew what this man was; how faithful he was to his master's interests; how little likelihood there was that any influence she might exert would move him.

Then her thoughts reverted to the confession extorted from her, the letter that her husband had taken from her dead lover's breast, and what terrible witnesses they would be against her.

She recalled her husband's words, "that he *would* lay them before her brothers," not that he *had* done so.

In all human probability those papers were about him while he spoke, that they were about him when——

Ah, God! how could she bear to look back upon that brief season of madness and despair, and the horrible work it had wrought?

For she was mad, mad! Had it been premeditated, had it been anything else but the frenzy of a hunted animal brought to bay, she would have secured those papers before she left.

As it was, she thought only of her children, of escaping the harsh sentence that had been pronounced upon her and them.

She must not go away and leave those papers behind, and where they would, if found, tell so strongly against her.

She would wait until midnight, when all the house was still, and go down and secure them,

A shiver ran through her veins, as she thought of all that this would involve, the danger that attended it, but for her children's sake, if not for her own, have them she must.

CHAPTER VI.

HER HUSBAND'S DIARY.

Now that Geraldine had fully made up her mind to get, at whatever cost, those dangerous papers into her own possession, she began to be feverishly impatient for the shades of night, under whose friendly cover it could alone be attempted.

Knowing what it was that had called Rattle from Hunt-

er's Lodge, and who he took with him, she had felt, at times, an almost irresistible impulse to confront this man, and wrest his secret from him.

But all this was now merged in the fear lest his return should prevent, or at least make it difficult, to carry her design into execution.

She employed the intervening time in making a thorough examination of her husband's papers, hoping to find some letter or memoranda that would give her some clew as to where he had sent her boy.

The desk in which he kept his private papers was locked, nor could she find any key that would open it.

Perceiving there was no other way to achieve her purpose, Geraldine determined to force the lock.

Procuring a chisel and some strong wire, and taking the precaution to send Bridget out to give her young charge an airing in her little carriage, Geraldine bolted the door, so as to guard against any interruption, and commenced operations.

She did not find so much difficulty as she expected; a few moments' vigorous handling of the instruments at her command, and the lock yielded.

Almost the first thing that Geraldine saw, as she opened the desk, was a photograph lying in one corner of it.

On the back of it, in her husband's handwriting, were these words:

"My Darling's Picture."

As she turned it over, her own lovely face, radiant with the bloom and brightness that had no part there now, smiled softly up at her.

She remembered when it was taken, a few days after her marriage, and, at her husband's request, attired as she stood at the altar, the bridal veil which fell around her enhancing, while it half veiled, her loveliness.

She recalled his lover-like devotion, the ill-concealed indifference, weariness, and even impatience with which she had received its every manifestation; the thought striking her for the first time that in marrying a woman who had no heart to give him, he had been more sinned against than sinning.

Laid carefully away, as though something exceedingly precious, were a few letters she had written him the first year of their marriage, during a temporary separation.

Untying the ribbon that bound them, she ran her eye over their contents.

How cold and brief they were, how different from the warm and loving epistles to which they responded, if a response they could be called!

The next thing she took up was a red morocco book with silver clasps, and on which, in black lettering, was the word "Diary."

She knew it to be her husband's; she had often seen him write in it latterly, with a dark, stern face, as though what he had to trace there made it anything but a pleasant task.

Possibly the clew she was anxious to obtain was here.

A strange feeling came over Geraldine as she opened it; it seemed like the opening of a tomb.

She recalled to mind the last time she had seen her husband sitting at his desk, with this book open before him—only a few days ago, though it seemed such a long time to her now.

How, with her baby on her knee, she had watched his dark, moody face, a strange, vague terror coming over her as she saw the change there.

She remembered how glad she was when he got up and left the room. Ah! if she could only see him sitting there again, no matter how dark his face might be or how heavy his hand against her! Oh! to be able to blot out the intervening time, with all its dark record!

Crushing down this wild, vain wish, Geraldine addressed herself to the task before her.

The first entries in the diary showed that it had been commenced before their marriage, and not long after he first saw her, being full of enthusiastic comments on her grace and beauty, and the impression they made upon him.

"*September* 3, 18—.—Was introduced last evening, by Lorenzo Gaspardo, to his sister, Geraldine. A young creature so altogether charming and lovely I never beheld. She is rather tall, but so perfectly molded that she does not seem the least bit too much so.

"Her eyes are large and expressive, with a velvety softness in their intense blackness that I never saw in any eyes before.

"She has the most lovely color, which is never stationary, but keeps coming and going in the most bewitching manner possible, and her hands are the whitest and softest imaginable.

"Her manner is as perfect as her face, being a most charming combination of girlish timidity, gentleness and grace.

"I have seen beautiful women by the score, but none that ever affected me as she does. I consider it to be a most fortunate thing my meeting her.

"Her brother was most kind and cordial. He invited me to call again, and I mean to do so."

"A most fortunate thing!"

As Geraldine read these words, there rose up before her the terrible look in her husband's eyes, as he cursed the day that he ever saw her false and beautiful face.

The scales suddenly fell from her blinded eyes.

Had he not reason to do so?

Instead of being his good angel, as she should have been, calling forth in him all that was good and gentle, had she not fanned in his breast the destroying fire that had wrought all this misery and desolation?

Taking up the diary, Geraldine read on.

For several pages, it was only a transcript of the above, or, rather, a detailed account of how the admiration it expressed grew and culminated into passionate love.

It seemed not to have entirely blinded him, for, in alluding to her, he wrote:

"It may be timidity, but it almost seems, sometimes, as if she were afraid of her brothers, who have an abrupt, if not to say harsh, way of speaking to her. Can it be that her home is not a happy one? It doesn't seem possible. Surely no one could treat harshly one so fair and gentle?

"But if it be so, it is only an additional incentive to me to offer her my love and protection; a home, in which nothing that is harsh or gloomy shall ever enter, a love so tender, that it will be joy to shield her from the slightest sorrow.

"My dainty and beautiful darling! how fast my heart beats at the thought that I shall some day hold her in my arms, my loved and loving wife. But I must not be too precipitate, lest I frighten her."

The next entry was made several weeks later, bearing the following date:

"*November* 4.—This has been a memorable and exciting day to me. Happy in some respects, and yet I hardly know whether it has not brought quite as much pain as pleasure.

"Geraldine, though born in this country, is Italian by descent, as her name indicates, her father being obliged to leave Italy, for some political offense, when quite a young man.

"Though I was pretty sure that her brothers favored my suit, knowing it to be customary with such, I made formal mention of my intentions before I said a word to my darling, though I hardly know that words were necessary to tell her how passing dear she had become.

"Her brothers not only gave me their cordial approval, but the assurance that their sister was heart-free and most favorably disposed toward me.

"This was in the morning.

"I saw Geraldine that same evening by appointment.

"To my astonishment and disappointment, when I broached the subject, she burst into tears, declaring that she had no heart to give me, that it was lying in her dead lover's grave.

"She looked so prettily as she said this, her eyes shone so brightly through the tears that filled them, and she was, in fact, so thoroughly charming in her helplessness and distress, that after the first shock was passed I was, if possible, more madly in love with her than ever; more thoroughly determined to win her heart, if it was in the power of mortal man to do so.

"Prefacing it with the assurance that she need fear no persecution from me, I besought her to remember how young she was—far too young and beautiful to doom herself to voluntary widowhood. If so much happiness was not for me, some more fortunate man would prove to her that affections blighted so early would bloom again.

"She shook her head at this as though she thought such a thing impossible, but her manner was so gentle, she thanked me so sweetly for my sympathy and forbearance, that I went away entertaining far more hope than fear.

"When I mentioned to Geraldine's brothers what she had told me, they made light of it, declaring it to be a foolish attachment, which they entirely disapproved of, a mere girlish fancy, that would soon die out.

"Lorenzo, the elder of the two, has offered to exert his influence in my behalf, which I gladly accepted, forbidding, however, that the slightest restraint should be put upon her inclinations.

"How it will result I hardly know, but she is so young, so gentle, that I can but hope for the best.

"*November* 10.—I am nearly wild with delight! Give me joy, my dear journal, Geraldine has promised to be mine! Having no one to confide in, I hardly know what I should do if I had not your friendly pages upon which to pour out all my hopes and fears.

"But let me relate what has occurred from the beginning.

"From motives of delicacy I did not visit Geraldine for a week—and a long week it seemed to me. Near its close, and just as I was thinking that I could stay away no longer, I received a message from her through her brother Lorenzo that she would like to see me.

"Hoping, though hardly daring to believe, that she had relented, I lost no time in responding to her summons. Meeting me at the door, her brother conducted me to the room where his sister was sitting.

"It was rather dimly lighted, and I thought her looking rather pale; but her mother had mentioned that she had suffered from some slight indisposition, induced by a cold, I think, so I thought nothing of that.

"To my great delight, my darling said, her voice trembling a little as she spoke, that she had reconsidered my proposition, and if, knowing what she had told me, I was willing to make her my wife, she would do her best to give me a wife's love and duty.

"Her words sounded a little strange and formal, but her brothers were present, which might account for that.

"As soon as she had ceased speaking, her elder brother stepped forward and placed her hand in mine. Then the two went out, leaving us together.

"She looked so fair and sweet as she stood there, her eyes cast timidly to the floor, that I could scarcely restrain myself from clasping her in my arms. But, determined to prove to her how little cause she had to fear, how desirous I was that she should have no occasion to regret the priceless privileges accorded me, I raised her hand tenderly to my lips, declaring how happy her words made me, and in spite of the past, I felt sure that I should be able to win her love, now that I had the opportunity.

"With her bright eyes shining brightly through tears, she faltered that she hoped I would give her time, and be gentle and patient with her.

"In a transport of love, I vowed that no man could be more tender, more gentle and patient than I would be with her.

"And, God helping me, I will keep my vow."

"*November* 18.—Everything is settled. We are to be married in two weeks. I can hardly realize that so much happiness is to be mine.

"One thing troubles me; I seem to make little headway in winning the confidence of my bride-elect. She is gentle, but so cold.

"I know my own disposition, how capable it is of being irritated by persistent opposition and dislike; that the very strength of my affections makes it all the harder for me to endure coldness and indifference from any one I love.

But why should I anticipate trouble? She is gentleness itself, and when she is once altogether mine I shall be able to win her heart. Love so true and tender as mine cannot fail to meet with some response."

December 3.—Yesterday was my wedding-day—the happiest day of my life, and the beginning, I hope, of many just as happy.

"Never did I see my darling look so lovely as when she stood at the altar. I have had a picture taken of her, at-

tired just as she was then, so that our children can see how their mother looked on her wedding-day. In a few hours we start on our bridal tour; so adieu, dear old journal, for the present."

January 3.—Home again, and not at all sorry to get back. Didn't enjoy the trip quite so well as I expected. We hurried about so much—my wife and I—seeing so many new things and people, that we had no time to be much together, in the true sense of the word. So that I am no more acquainted with my darling than I was before—sometimes it seems less so.

"But all this will be changed, now that we are at home, *our* home, under the same roof, with every opportunity of understanding and growing nearer to each other.

"I never knew before the pleasure of having wealth at my command. At my wife's request I have taken a house in the city, newly furnishing it throughout. I have spared neither pains nor expense to make it a fitting nest for my bird, consulting her taste in everything. I never knew Geraldine to be so much pleased with anything. She looked so charming in her excitement and animation, thanking me so prettily for my attention to her wishes, that I took the courage to ask her for a kiss.

"She gave it to me, but—God forgive me if I wrong her—more as if it was a debt that was due than if she cared to do so."

"*February* 2.—I never dreamed that Geraldine was so fond of society and admiration. She lives in one constant whirl of excitement, seldom spending an evening at home, except when she has company. She pays no attention to my expostulations, seeming to care nothing for her home or husband.

"All this is very hard, but I must be patient with her—so far as I can be. There is only one thing certain, that if I lose patience at all it will be entirely. If I allow myself to speak it will be so harshly that it will erect a still more impassable barrier between us. It is not in me to do anything half-way."

"*March* 4.—In spite of my disapproval, manifested in many ways, Geraldine's gay life continues. We have had words more than once, on my part harsh and stern, as it is my nature to be when roused, on her part so cold and indifferent that they stung me nearly to madness.

"She accuses me of playing the tyrant, of wishing to deprive her of all the enjoyment that life has for her.

"I know that my heart is slowly but surely hardening against her, but it is her work, not mine.

"God knows how all this will end."

Geraldine had read with such breathless interest this

strange, and to her, now, most sad revelation of the heart that had been a sealed book to her so long—who should have known it best and prized it most—that she had been unmindful of the flight of time.

As she read the last sentence, her eyes were suddenly blinded by the remorseful tears that were now falling fast.

"God knows how all this will end!"

Though it might be hidden from every mortal eye, *she* knew how it all had ended.

What tears, though they might flow "like a river," could ever wash away a guilt like hers, or make those soft, fair hands white again?

Hearing Bridget's step upon the tairs, together with the prattling sound of the baby in her arms, Geraldine thrust the book back into the desk, and, hastily closing it, unbolted the door.

The kind-hearted girl saw the trace of tears on her mistress' cheek, and ascribing it to only one cause, said:

"Sure, an' I wudn't be afther frettin' fur the masther, ma'am; he'll not coom to any harm. Somethin's tuck him away onexpicted. He'll be here the day."

Making no reply to words intended to be consolatory, but whose effect was so different, Geraldine took the babe that sprung to her arms, and going to an obscure corner of the room, where her tears could fall unnoticed, sat listening to the sharp reproaches of the suddenly-awakened conscience that had slumbered so long.

CHAPTER VII.

REMORSE THAT CAME TOO LATE.

KNOWING what was to be done that night, and how necessary it was that there should be no one to watch or hinder, Geraldine decided to have an early supper, so that she might count on the house being still.

"Did you see Prue making any preparations for supper as you came by?" she said to Bridget, as she laid the sleeping child in its cradle. "I want mine early to-night."

"Faith, an' I did; an' it's somethin' mighty noice, too, be the smell av it. Hot corn cakes, I'm thinkin'—pones, she calls 'em—made with eggs an' crame. Sure, an' she's an illegant cook; I'll say that mooch fur her. Give ould Nick his due, an' hiven the glory!"

As heavy as Geraldine's heart was, she could not forbear a faint smile at Bridget's emphatic and rather peculiar way of expressing herself.

Supper being brought, it was dispatched very quickly so far as Geraldine was concerned, Bridget being the only one that did full justice to the tempting article she de

scribed so eloquently, her appetite being one of the kind that seems "to grow by what it feeds on."

Geraldine had always had Isabel sleep in a little crib beside her own bed. Now she said:

"I think I will let baby sleep in the nursery with you to-night, Bridget. I am so restless that I think it will be better for both. You mustn't mind if you hear me walking about in the night, my good girl; it's a way I have lately."

"Sure, an' I won't moind it, ma'am, or hear it, aither, for that mather. I shall go to slape as soon as me head touches the pillow, an' it'll take a dale more nor that to wake me."

Geraldine was not sorry to hear this, as it tended to make what she had to do more safe and easy.

As Bridget was up betimes, she retired early, being sound asleep by nine o'clock, as her heavy breathing showed.

Having ascertained, by personal investigation, that little Isabel was sleeping quite as peacefully, Geraldine went to her own room, bolting the door.

There being yet three hours to midnight, she resumed the reading of her husband's diary, which seemed to have a strange fascination to her.

The entry following the one last read ran thus:

"*March* 28.—I can endure this life no longer. For the last two weeks I have escorted Geraldine every evening to the gay scenes that are so distasteful to me—she is far too young and beautiful to go alone—only to see her lavish upon others the smiles and pleasant words that she denies to me.

"I know what I will do. She shall know me as master of the home, of which she disdains to be mistress, in any true sense of the word. I will sell my house here, and go into the country, where solitude and reflection may humble if not teach her something of the duty she owes me."

It was painful to note the change that was slowly going on in the heart of the writer, and against which he seemed to struggle, though vainly.

He no longer called her his "darling," or praised her gentleness and beauty. It was a dark record of love, chilled by indifference, imbittered by jealousy, and turning into a sharp sword to pierce the heart of both.

But still Geraldine read on, her heart faint and sick with a sorrow and remorse that came too late.

"*April* 20.—I have carried into effect my resolution, and we have been two weeks in our new home. Things remain

much as they have been—I am changing fast enough, and it is all *her* work.

"She called me a tyrant yesterday. Let her beware; that prophecy may come true. I feel it in me to be such—hard, cruel and pitiless.

"I can see that she is beginning to fear me; taking a curious sort of pleasure in the knowledge. It is a satisfaction to be able to influence her in any way.

"One thing is certain—I will never again be a suppliant for her love, though I shall take good care that she has no opportunity to lavish her smiles on any one else."

Here followed a silence of three months.

"*July* 10.—A new hope has dawned upon me. In a few months I shall be a father. Surely no woman, with a woman's heart in her bosom, can fail to have some consideration, some tenderness for the father of her child? Perhaps this new tie—that which will be neither hers nor mine, but *ours*—will bring our hearts, in some degree, nearer to each other. God grant it."

"*December* 9.—My first-born son has been laid in my arms. He is like his mother, having her dark eyes and jetty hair, and is a most lovely boy. Will his advent bring any sunshine into my dark and wretched life?"

"*February* 28.—My boy is growing daily in intelligence and beauty. Geraldine is devoted to him, seeming only to live in his presence. Nothing can exceed the affection that speaks so eloquently in every word and look.

"But, alas! alas! it has brought no softening of her heart toward me, his father.

"Is it my fault, I wonder? Perhaps it is. My feelings have been so often chilled and thrown back upon my heart, that I cannot act as I would. I can only stand aloof, with lowering brow and heart torn with love and jealousy, feeling that it is something in which I have no part.

"But there is one good result. She is more contented, no longer reproaching me for immuring her away from all society."

"*June* 3.—Yesterday I stood upon the portico, looking through the open window upon my child, and my child's mother, unnoticed by either. I never saw a prettier sight in my life, or a lovelier look in Geraldine's face as she sat there smiling upon the boy that was prattling on her knee. As I gazed, all the old love came back, and I felt that I would be content to die to win one such look, one such smile.

"In my eager intentness my arm brushed the vine that partially shaded the window, and Geraldine glanced up,

the expression of it changing so, as her eye met mine, that it hardly seemed like the same face.

"Never did I feel how utterly useless it was to hope to be anything more to her than I am."

For several months the entries made, from time to time, were of the same tenor, betraying the gloom and bitterness that were sinking down heavier and heavier upon his heart.

Then came the following:

"*March* 15.—We have had a terrible scene, during which Geraldine has spoken words that I hardly dared trust myself to look back upon.

"It seems that her brothers deceived her in regard to her lover's death—that he is still living. She accuses me of being a party to the deception.

"I think my words and manner convinced her that I had no part in it. But can I ever forget the words she uttered, 'that she loved this man now, and should love him always.'"

"False wife and mother! it was with difficulty that I restrained myself from striking her to the floor.

"She once called me 'her jailer.' I will be that to her, if nothing else. And she will find me a vigilant one. She shall never leave Hunter's Lodge while I live, and I will keep a strict watch over all her movements."

Six months later, August 20, he chronicled the birth of his baby-girl, but with no emotion of hope or joy.

"*September* 28.—I have been absent for the last two weeks. Prue, my faithful old nurse, has strange news for me. She says that my wife has been meeting a man down by the river. Swears that it is the same one that she saw prowling about early last spring.

"Rattle corroborates her statement.

"My brain seems on fire with the horrible suggestions to which this gives rise, and there are times when I find it hard to resist the impulses that come over me. But no, no; however ill she may have treated me, however hard I may be, I will be just. I will trust to no hearsay evidence. I will know if this shameful thing be so with my own eyes.

"If it be true, God have mercy on them both, for I will show none!

"I will make as though I was going away again, but stay home and watch."

The next entry bore no date, but was probably written the day after, being so blotted as to be hardly legible.

"It was, it *is* true—and oh! if that were all. The sun shines upon me to-day, not only a dishonored husband, but a *murderer!*

"I saw him with his arms around her, his kiss upon her lips, and my brain went wild.

"Clutching the dagger that was destined to find that black and treacherous heart, I followed him.

"I took from his lifeless body a letter that *she* wrote—full of love for him, and detestation for me, her husband—whose greatest sin until now has been in loving her too well, whose heaviest misfortune it is that he ever saw her.

"I call Heaven to witness that she has been my curse and ruin, here and hereafter! And may the knowledge of it pursue her through life and haunt her dying pillow!"

Geraldine could endure no more.

Uttering a smothered cry of horror, she threw herself forward upon her face, that terrible curse still ringing in her ears.

As in a mirror, it all rose up before her; the selfishness that could see no wrongs or sorrows but her own, the blindness and perversity that had called forth the demon in her husband's heart, making him all that he was.

She remembered that, however hard and harsh of late years, there had been a time when he had not been so; that in the first months of their marriage no man could be more tender and loving than he.

In the light of these revelations, how black her sin looked. Would she ever be able to atone?

As she lay thus, with her forehead in the dust, the clock in the hall below struck the hour of midnight, bringing to mind the work that was before her, and which must be done now or never.

As the last stroke, sounding so distinctly in the silence, died upon the air, pale but resolute, Geraldine arose.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO MIDNIGHT VISITS.

HAVING forgotten to take the precaution of procuring a dark lantern, Geraldine decided that it would be safer for her not to light her candle until she came to the narrow passage underground, and which led to the secret chamber.

She attired herself in a large cloak, which had a hood attached to it, the latter partially hiding the face without obscuring too much of the vision.

After pausing by the nursery door, to see if Bridget was still sleeping, and being reassured by her heavy breathing, Geraldine took her way down-stairs, moving slowly and cautiously along, eye and ear on the alert, lest she should be watched and followed.

She found no difficulty in finding the steep, narrow stairs, that she remembered so well mounting on that

never-to-be-forgotten morning, and which led to the subterranean passage.

She had had the faint light of the moon to guide her above, she was now plunged into a darkness so intense that she could almost feel it.

Feeling that she was going in the right direction, and that it would be safer for her to defer striking a light as long as possible, Geraldine groped her way along, her heart beating faster and faster, with the strange terror there as she neared the end of her journey.

Taking the key from her bosom, she was about to strike a light, when she heard the sound of a step.

Turning her eyes in the direction whence she had come, she saw the faint glimmer of a light.

Fortunately she was opposite a small recess, formed by a turn in the wall, and throwing herself down upon her knees in one corner of it, she contracted herself into as small a compass as possible, awaiting in trembling suspense the approach of the footsteps, and which drew nearer and nearer.

They came opposite the place where she crouched—passed it.

Whatever it was, it carried a bunch of keys. Geraldine could hear it jingle with every step.

As she expected, feared, it paused in front of the door of the cell, which was only a short distance.

Cautiously raising her head, Geraldine listened, fixing her eyes intently upon the faint light, which, streaming out upon the darkness, served to make it more visible.

She heard the door tried, and then shook with a vigorous hand.

Then a familiar voice said:

"Be you in there, Marse Robert?"

Here the speaker gave another violent shake to the door.

"It's me, Prue, your old nurse."

Forgetting everything else in her terror and alarm, Geraldine listened breathlessly, almost expecting to hear some reply. But not a sound broke the profound hush that followed.

Then she heard Prue trying to turn the lock by means of the keys she brought, a muttered word of impatience heralding each and every failure.

Evidently despairing of effecting an entrance, with slow and reluctant steps the old colored woman began to retrace her steps, muttering:

"Somethin's wrong, an' *she's* at the bottom of it. If Rattle was only here."

Geraldine pressed herself closely against the wall, Prue passing so near to the place where she was secreted, that

had not her eyes been dimmed with age she could not have failed to see the dark figure that crouched there.

As it was, Prue passed along, muttering, and shaking the bunch of keys viciously as she went.

After waiting until the last faint footfall had died in the distance, Geraldine arose, glad enough to be released from her constrained position.

Having no fears of Prue's return, at least that night, she stooped for the key that she had dropped in her trepidation when she first heard her approach, but was unable to find it.

Lighting the candle, she found, to her astonishment, the place on which she was standing to be solid rock.

Near the wall, in the corner, where she had hidden from old Prue, was a deep fissure or crack in it. On putting her ear down to this, she heard the rush of water hundreds of feet below.

As the key was nowhere to be found, the conviction pressed strongly upon Geraldine's mind that it had fallen down this place. She remembered hearing a peculiar sound in corroboration of this, though she was too terrified to take any note of it at the time.

After another careful search, so as to make sure that it was not where it would fall into the hands of any one else, Geraldine retraced her way back, reaching her own room without meeting any one, or being missed.

After divesting herself of her cloak and slipping on a loose white wrapper, she went into the nursery, where she found Isabel quietly sleeping, and Bridget in the same deep, unbroken slumber.

Returning to her own room, Geraldine threw herself upon the bed, so utterly exhausted in both body and mind that she fell asleep almost immediately.

When she opened her eyes the sun was shining brightly into her room, and so heavily had she slept, that she felt more like one that had been aroused from death than ordinary slumber.

As all the wretched past and dreary present rose up before her, she closed her eyes, with the wish uppermost in her mind that she might never open them again.

But the prattling sound of her baby in the adjoining room brought other and better thoughts.

During all the time she was dressing, Geraldine's thoughts were busy.

How much Prue knew it was impossible to say, but that she knew something of her trouble with her husband was evident.

She recalled the old woman's evident surprise at her sud-

den return, and which pointed strongly to the suspicion that she knew of her incarceration in the cell below.

Why did she go down there, as though she had expected to find her master inside of those stone walls, calling upon him so strangely?

Could it be that she knew of his going there on that fatal morning, from whence he never came out alive?

After breakfast Geraldine was sitting in her room, with little Isabel on her knee.

The open doorway leading into the hall suddenly darkening, she glanced up, not a little surprised at the dark object that stood there, regarding her with a look quite as dark as herself.

As long as Geraldine had been at Hunter's Lodge, Prue had never crossed the threshold of her room, and even now she took good care not to do so.

Prue's words were quite as abrupt and startling as her appearance.

"Whar's the key to the room in the suller?"

"The room in the cellar?" repeated Geraldine, more to gain time, than because she failed to understand, or had any expectation of deceiving the sharp-witted old woman. "What a strange question to ask *me*."

"It ain't strange at all. It's the very question anybody'd ask that had the leastest hope of gettin' a straight answer."

Determined to force her opponent to show her hand, Geraldine now turned suddenly upon her.

"What do *you* know about that room?"

"Not so much as you do," was the grim response, "as I hain't never sot foot in it yet."

Geraldine's face paled a little; it was all out now. Not that she was sorry to know just how little she had to hope from that quarter, how much to fear.

Reluctant as she was to discuss the matter, she went on:

"What should I know about it? Do you know of any one ever being so wronged as to be made a prisoner there?"

Prue flung her arms aloft with a dissenting and scornful gesture.

"*You* wronged? Marse Robert was the las' of ol' mars'r's chil'un. Mis'us put him in my arms when he warn't more'n a day ol', an' I nussed him last an' loved him best. I've knowed him, baby, boy, an' man, an' nobody couldn't know him better. I knowed well 'nough what was in him when his blood was up, an' how hard he could be with them that wronged him. But it was never fur nothin' with them as was his friends; he allers had the lovinest heart an' the sweetest temper. I knowed what he was afore he met you, with a merry word an' smile fur everybody. I

knowed what he was arterward. I see a change a-creepin' over him, an' your hand in it all. Many's the time I's seen him ride pas' the pantry winder as ef pursued by devils, an' knowed you'd had words together, an' that you was drivin' him to destruction as fas' as you could."

Pale as death, Geraldine arose, and placing Isabel in the arms of the wondering Bridget, signed her to leave the room.

"What else do you know?"

Stretching out her long, dark arm with an accusing gesture, Prue continued:

"I knowed you to be the falsest of all false wives; I's seen him, who come prowlin' 'bout the place, an' knowed what he come for. I's seen you creepin' out of the house at night, and knowed what you went fur."

"Is that all?"

"No. I's knowed all that's happened since—'cept whar he is gone to. Marse Robert telled me the night afore, that, bad as you was, you was the mother of his boy, an' he wouldn't harm you. That he was goin' to take ye to yer brother's the next mornin', an' never look on yer face agin. I's seen him the next mornin', just as 'twas growin' light, drivin' the carriage to the door. I seen him go into the house, but never seen him come out, though I was watchin' so's to see ye go. I seen you, a few hours after, lookin' an' goin' 'bout as if nothin' had happened, but him I's seen, never, no more!"

Here Prue ceased, her words ending in a prolonged wail, like that of a wild animal deprived of her young.

Geraldine saw at a glance the array of evidence that it was in the speaker's power to bring against her, feeling very much as if she was standing upon the brink of some precipice, and where a careless step might precipitate her to the depths below.

Something must be done to stave off this danger, if no more.

"How ridiculously you talk, Prue. Were it not caused by your fondness for your master, I should be seriously angry. You don't suppose that I've made way with a man, so much larger and stronger that he could hold me with one hand if he tried?"

This evidently staggered Prue, who rolled her dark eyes about, displaying the whites of them in a way peculiar to her race.

"I dunno what to think."

"Of course you can't think *I* have had any hand in his disappearance," continued Geraldine, following up her advantage. "I know you have always disliked me, and per-

haps not without some reason; but that is too ridiculous to be seriously entertained for a moment."

It seemed so on the face of it, and yet the old woman looked far from convinced.

"Whar has he gone?"

"Not having posted me as to his movements, I couldn't give you the faintest idea," responded Geraldine, resuming her seat by the window. "He might have gone to various places. He wasn't in the habit of letting me know whither he was going, or why."

"'Cause you never cared what he did, or anythin' 'bout him," interposed Prue, who always resented any reflection upon her foster-child.

"Oh, I dare say it is my fault—in your eyes, at all events. I only mentioned the fact. You know, as well as I do, that he was in the habit of going away just as abruptly."

"I don't dispute that 'ar. If it warn't fur the rest that I knowed I wouldn't think strange on't, nuther. As 'tis, I think it's mighty cur'us."

"When your master comes, perhaps to-night, to-morrow, or the day after, you'll laugh at all these foolish fancies."

Perhaps it was Geraldine's conciliatory and pleasant tone, and which she had never condescended to use before, but Prue's face did not brighten at this cheering prognostication; on the contrary, it darkened with a suspicion that she did not know how to put into words.

"If I laugh, it'll be with joy at seein' him. Not that I 'spect any such good fortin'. There's somethin' happened, or goin' to happen. I have such a cur'us feelin' sometimes, as ef I couldn't draw my bref, an' little shivers run over me. I feel as ef I was in a house *whar somebody's dead!*"

These strange words, uttered in a hollow, sepulchral voice, had a startling effect upon Geraldine; covering her eyes with both hands, she uttered a suppressed scream.

Evidently taking a grim satisfaction in this result, Prue continued:

"As I said afore, I put all these yer things together, an' they's mighty cur'us. This is why I axed ye fur the key. Ef he ain't thar, thar can't be no harm in lookin'."

Vexed at her want of self-control, and the inferences that might be drawn from it, Geraldine now said:

"You are enough to give one a fit of the horrors, Prue. Believe me or not, just as you choose, I haven't the key you speak of, nor do I know where it is."

Geraldine spoke with a good deal of decision, looking her accuser steadily in the eye.

Apparently unconvinced, Prue turned sullenly from the door.

"There's somethin' wrong, some'eres, an' I'll find out what 'tis 'fore I'm many days older."

Prue uttered these words going down the stairs, but they came very distinctly to Geraldine through the open door-way, and shuddering as she thought of her lonely, defenseless position, she again covered her face with her hands.

"Did onybody iver hear the likes av that?" was Bridget's indignant ejaculation, who had been drawn to the room by her mistress' involuntary cry, and was unable to keep silent any longer.

"I am ridiculously nervous," said Geraldine, forcing a smile, "and Prue always makes me more so."

"Sure, an' I shud think she wud, ma'am. It made me crape all over to hear her wild talk. Not that I understand onything, but that she nursed the masther whin he was a babby, an' wanted you to give her the kay av the suller. Sure, an' she might have nursed me husband and all me relations, an' I wudn't put up with her imperdunce, so I wudn't!"

"She isn't worth minding, Bridget. She talks very wildly, as you say. In fact, I've often suspected, of late, that her mind was disordered."

Geraldine was in that state of mind which led her to fear danger where she had cause to fear it least. She might have dismissed the uneasy feeling at her heart, lest Bridget's suspicions had been aroused by Prue's strange words and manner, had she known how little credence the girl placed upon anything she said.

"To think av her axing ye for the kay av the suller," she said, as she busied herself in righting the room. "Sure, an' it's drunk or crazy she is!"

CHAPTER IX.

TWO UNWELCOME ARRIVALS.

NOT long after Geraldine's interview with old Prue, there came the hurried tramp of horse's feet along the main avenue which led to the house.

"Who is it, Bridget?" inquired Geraldine, coming to the window opening out upon the balcony upon which the girl stood, and who had uttered an exclamation, apparently of satisfaction and triumph.

"Sure, an' I thought it was the masther, but it ain't," said Bridget, in a disappointed tone, who honestly believed that her mistress' sadness was occasioned solely by his absence.

"It's a tall, dark gintlemon. Looks like a furrener," continued Bridget, whose ideas of foreigners were considerably mixed, by no means putting herself down in the same category.

Stepping out upon the balcony, Geraldine peered through the vines at the new-comer, who had flung himself from his horse and was now standing beside the panting animal, who looked as if he had been hardly driven.

"It is my brother."

Geraldine spoke quietly, but with the absence of the pleasure and satisfaction so natural under the circumstances, adding, a moment later:

"You can take baby down-stairs, Bridget; my brother is not very fond of children."

"Nor very fond of onybody, I'm thinkin'," was the girl's shrewd reflection, as she passed Gaspardo on the stairs, on his way to his sister's room, and whose lowering brow indicated that he was in anything but a pleasant mood. "It's aisy seen that he's one of thim that's fondest of himself."

Gaspardo was the oldest and least loved of Geraldine's brothers. Her chief incentive in marrying was to escape his harsh rule, who had been her terror from childhood, nor did he make any attempt to disguise his satisfaction at having "got her off his hands," as he called it.

So there was no pretense of anything more than the most formal greeting between the brother and sister as they met.

"Where is Mr. Bayard?"

That she was forced to hear so many times so very natural a query, was not the least of the sufferings of this unhappy lady, and she was so long in replying that, frowning impatiently, Gaspardo was about to repeat his question when the answer came.

"He is gone. I cannot tell you where."

"Strange, very strange!"

For the first time, Geraldine fixed her eyes full upon the speaker's face, which had a disturbed look.

"I don't consider it anything strange. He is in the habit of going away just as abruptly, and without telling me where."

"I don't mean his going, but his sending me the note he did."

"Note?" responded Geraldine, faintly, and with sinking heart.

"Yes. Appointing an interview with Pedro and myself, at Eagle's Nest, yesterday morning."

Geraldine drew a long breath as though the weight was lifted a little from her heart.

"Was that all that it contained?"

"That was all that it *said*. It implied more. In fact, it was so mysteriously worded, that it was impossible for either Pedro or me to discover what it meant, especially as he failed to keep his appointment. We both stayed in all day, waiting for you."

"For *me*?" repeated Geraldine, again taking the alarm. "Did you expect me to come with him?"

"That is what the note says. You can judge for yourself," replied Gaspardo, tossing it into her lap.

Picking it up, with cold, unsteady fingers, Geraldine read, through the mist that floated before her eyes, what were probably the last lines her husband ever wrote.

It was dated the evening previous to that fatal morning —the last morning of his life, and was as follows:

"I shall be at Eagle's Nest at an early hour to-morrow morning, to confer with yourself and brother in regard to an important matter, touching the honor of us both.

"Your sister, Geraldine, and her last-born child, will come with me. ROBERT BAYARD."

"What do you make of it?"

Geraldine did not dare to raise her eyes to those of the speaker, still keeping them fixed on the paper in her hand.

"I think that it is very mysteriously worded, as you say."

"I don't need to be told that. What do you know about it?"

It was a matter of scornful surprise to Geraldine later, that she, whose hands were stained with so dark a crime, should feel so scrupulous about uttering a direct falsehood to cover it. But the crime was mainly the result of impulse, while the habit of truthfulness was too strongly ingrained in her character to be easily set aside.

So there was considerable hesitancy and constraint in her tone and manner, as she said:

"I did not know that Mr. Bayard had written, or made any appointment with you, either for myself or him."

Gaspardo's visible impatience now broke forth in words.

"Do you know *anything* about it?"

This sharp, impatient tone acted as a stimulus to those trembling nerves; she turned her eyes steadily upon the speaker's face.

"About what? I have already told you that I know nothing about the writing of the note, or the appointment. What more do you want to know?"

"Considerable more than you seem inclined to tell me," was the grim response; "but I mean to get it out of you for all that."

Here there was a knock at the door.

It was Prue, who rolled her eyes in a very mysterious manner from one to the other.

"Rattle got back. He want to see Mr. Gaspardo 'fore he goes; he got somethin' 'ticular to tell him 'bout Marse Robert."

Here there was another ominous roll of the eyes upon Geraldine, who, as she felt the net closing around her, began to rouse herself for the struggle, well knowing, not only that the odds were against her, but all that defeat meant.

"Where has Rattle been?" inquired Gaspardo.

"He went to take Marse Lionel 'way, sah."

"Master Lionel! Where has *he* gone?"

Prue looked at Geraldine, and was silent.

Following the direction of those eyes, Gaspardo now addressed his sister.

"Where has the boy gone, Geraldine?"

"I don't know."

That sinister face had a still darker look.

"That will do, Prue. Tell Rattle that I will see him. I have some business to transact with Mrs. Bayard first."

Old Prue chuckled audibly as she went down the stairs.

"Business?" she muttered. "Yes, yes; it'll be pretty black business for *her*. She thought she got froo the woods now Marse Robert gone, but she'll find, I reckon, that she only hopped out of the fryin'-pan inter the fire."

CHAPTER X.

THE BROTHER AND SISTER.

When Gaspardo resumed his seat, after Prue's departure, Geraldine had changed her position.

When her brother entered she had designedly sat with her back to the window; now she was sitting by it in order that the cool breeze that came through it might assist her in recovering from the slight faintness that came over her.

This change brought the light full upon her face.

"What's the matter with you?"

Startled by this abrupt query, Geraldine involuntarily raised her hand to her forehead, as if she feared that some tell-tale mark there—like that of Cain—had betrayed her.

"The matter?" she faltered.

"Yes. You look as if you had had some serious illness since I saw you last."

"I have never been very strong since the birth of my baby."

"It is not that. I saw you less than three weeks ago, and you did not look as you do now."

There was not the faintest gleam of pity in those keen eyes as they rested on Geraldine's face, noting all the change there. They looked as if their owner were engaged on some problem, putting this and that together in the hope of solving it.

Perhaps some such thought was suggested to Geraldine, for there was a little curl to her lip as she said:

"I never knew you to betray so much brotherly solicitude before."

In the impatient lifting of Gaspardo's shoulder there was no small element of contempt.

"If I have any solicitude, it is for the family honor, and not the weak feeling to which you allude."

Determined to know the full extent of the danger that menaced her, Geraldine went on:

"And who is endangering that important thing, in your estimation, the family honor?"

"*You!*

"It is useless for us to waste any more time in skirmishing," continued Gaspardo, after a moment's pause. "You have been acquainted with me long enough to know that I am not a man that is very easily deceived. You know something of the nature of the appointment that your husband failed to keep, and it is useless for you to deny it."

Cornered, Geraldine now turned upon her inquisitor.

"There is one thing that I deny, and that is your right to question me."

There was a complete change in Gaspardo's look and tone, as he arose to his feet.

"You prefer, then, that I get my information from other sources? *Be careful!*"

These words sent a sudden shiver through Geraldine's veins, but she had sufficient self-command to give no outward token of the terror with which they inspired her.

"You will act as you think proper, of course. I thought, perhaps, that the family honor—I make no mention of the family affection that has no existence in your heart—would prevent your taking any such course as that."

Perhaps if Geraldine had foreseen all to which it would eventually lead, she would have refrained from appealing to this ruling passion of her brother's heart.

It acted as a temporary check, however. Resuming his seat, he now said:

"You are right. I have to deal with you only; and I think that you will find me fully equal to the task. Perverse, headstrong girl! knowing me as you do, can you, *dare* you defy me?"

"You forget that I am a girl no longer. I am a married woman, and in no way subject to your control."

"I don't forget that I discharged my duty by you, as your brother and the head of the family, by providing you with a husband much too good for you. But where is he?"

Oh! ghastly object, continually resurrected, forever haunting her with its white face and glaring eyes, was this question never to cease?

"One would think," said Geraldine, with a visible effort at lightness and ease, "from the frequency with which this question is asked me, that I was supposed to keep him under lock and key."

Gaspardo kept his wary eyes fixed upon the speaker's face, his brow wearing a still more gloomy frown.

"It is useless for you to try to deceive *me*. I have had my eye on you for a long time, my lady. I knew that you were bound to bring trouble on yourself and disgrace on our family if you could. I advised your husband to bring you off up here, hoping to avoid it."

"So I have to thank you for that, too!" responded Geraldine, with white and quivering lips. "It was such a kind, brotherly thing in you to seek to isolate me thus from all human companionship—so like you in fact, that I wonder that I didn't recognize your hand in it before."

"I tried to save you from ruin," was the stern response, "but I have only deferred, it seems, the inevitable result of the course you have taken ever since your marriage. The time was when your husband was blindly and foolishly devoted to you, loving you with a tenderness and passion that I never saw equaled. But you persistently set out, from your wedding day, to do all you could to imbitter and alienate his heart, making your home all that you have made it."

There was sufficient truth in this reproach to send it home to Geraldine's heart, and then there were circumstances that induced her to be more tender of her husband dead than she had ever been of him living.

Those flashing eyes softened with tears, as she said:

"The greatest wrong I ever did my husband was to marry him—and whose fault was this? *Yours!* You knew, when you urged him upon me, that I had no love for him—nay, that my heart was already won. Who told me that the man I loved was dead, when you knew him to be living? Who made my home so wretched that I was glad to get out of it on any terms? *You!*"

"I neither deny nor regret the part I acted in the affair you mention; so you need get up no heroics on that score. I did my best to prevent your disgracing our name by marrying a needy adventurer, even as I shall do my best now to prevent your bringing a worse disgrace on it."

"You speak in riddles."

Gaspardo surveyed the speaker for a few moments in silence.

"You understand me, I think. I shall have little difficulty in making you understand me, at all events. You have had serious trouble with your husband?"

Both look and tone were interrogative. Folding her arms tightly over her rapidly-beating heart, Geraldine said:

"You seem to be so well posted in my affairs, knowing so much more about them than I do, that it would be presumptuous in me to give you any additional information."

"You might throw light on some dark points, however, not only saving me time and trouble, but earning for yourself the forbearance that you will be likely to need. Not that I suppose you will do it, or that you need suppose that it will prove any hinderance to me in the end. I am not so ignorant as you think, and by what I already know I can easily conjecture the rest. I know who has been lurking in this neighborhood for several months past. I have every reason to believe that you have had stolen interviews with him. Had I positive knowledge of it, your punishment would be so swift and sharp as to give you no opportunity to bring any further disgrace upon our name. I will be just, but I warn you that I will show no mercy."

There was a faint curl to Geraldine's lips as she said:

"As though any one that knew Lorenzo Gaspardo would expect mercy from him."

Without appearing to hear this taunt, Gaspardo continued:

"Whether or not there is any actual guilt on your part of this, I am convinced that you have designedly driven your husband wild with jealousy in the hope that it would lead him to seek a divorce, thus leaving you free to marry your lover. But you may be sure of one thing, that the day of your marriage will be the day of your death and his."

Carefully noting Geraldine's sudden start, Gaspardo went on:

"I am convinced, furthermore, that the appointment your husband made with me was to consult me in reference to this matter, knowing how averse I would be to any public exposure. Why he failed to keep it I do not know, but fear that it is because he has decided to appeal to the law for redress. If this be so, and it becomes a matter of public notoriety, you will have good cause to wish that you had never been born."

Geraldine was so amazed and confounded at the conclusions at which her brother had arrived—conclusions so natural, under the circumstances, and yet so wide of the

mark—that for a time she had room for no other thought or feeling.

She made no reply, neither did her brother wait for any.

Gaspardo took his way down-stairs, proceeding directly to that part of the house considered by Prue as her especial province.

The old woman was evidently expecting him, though she gave no token of it save by the additional roll to the eyes, and which brought the whites of them so prominently into view.

Gaspardo glanced impatiently around.

"Where's Rattle? I thought he wanted to see me."

"He had to go down town, an' couldn't wait, sah. Tol' me to say that he'd be at your place this evenin', sah."

Gaspardo looked narrowly at the speaker.

"You've lived with Mr. Bayard a good many years, Prue, and must know him and his affairs as well, if not better, than anybody else."

The faithful old creature raised a corner of her checked apron to her eyes, overcome by the recollections called forth by these words, together with the fears that oppressed her.

"I's his ol' nuss, sah, and thar' ain't nobody as ever knowed or loved him better. I had the car' of all ol' mars'r's chil'un——"

"I know, I know," interrupted Gaspardo, with an impatient wave of the hand, "and it is because of this that I thought you might be somewhat in his confidence. Do you know whether Mr. Bayard and his wife have had any trouble lately?"

Prue rolled her eyes upon the speaker, and then around the room, with the mysterious air that seemed to be habitual to her of late. But though her manner indicated that she could reveal volumes if she chose, her lips were silent.

With his eyes still fixed upon that black, wrinkled face, Gaspardo went on, the sullen gloom deepening upon his brow as he did so.

"It's no mincing matter; things have gone too far for that now. My sister and her husband have never lived happily together; nor am I the man to deny, because she *is* my sister, that it is entirely her fault. From a note I received from Mr. Bayard, together with some other things that have come to my knowledge, I am convinced that they have had serious trouble of late. What I want you to tell me is, if you know the nature of this trouble, where your master is gone, and if you think he has any idea of separating from his wife?"

Prue was in no way loath to tell Gaspardo what she

knew in regard to these points, together with her fears and conjectures, much of which the reader already knows.

All that he heard tended to confirm Gaspardo in the suspicion—a terrible one to him—that had taken such strong possession of his mind.

Either because he was Geraldine's brother, or on account of its being so incredible—perhaps both reasons influenced her—Prue hesitated about mentioning the darkest of her fears.

There was something in Gaspardo's words and manner that tended to allay this.

"Then you don't think, sah," she said, in conclusion, "that Marse Robert's been made way wid?"

"Made away with! of course not. Who'd make away with him?"

Prue looked a little dubiously at the speaker.

"I don't name no names, sah, but there's somebody we both know that would be mighty glad, in my 'pinion, ef he *was* made way with."

"You mean my sister, I suppose?" said Gaspardo, coolly. "And so far as the wish is concerned, I dare say you are right, but both strength and opportunity are wanting."

"But there's the man she do like," persisted Prue, "an' who's been skulkin' 'bout here fur so long, p'r'aps she done got him to do it?"

Gaspardo looked a little startled at this suggestion; then he said:

"That is more likely, but not at all probable. By your own account, you saw Mr. Bayard drive up to the door, for the purpose of taking my sister to me. You saw him go into the house, didn't you?"

"Yes, sah. But I's never seen him come out, or sot eyes on him from that day to this."

"But he might have done so, for all that; there are more entrances and more ways of getting out of the house and place than one. My idea is, owing either to the persuasions of his wife or some change in his own views, he has decided to take a different course. I think we shall find that he has gone to the city to consult his lawyer."

"I hope so, sah; I'd be glad 'nough to think so. But it seems mighty cur'us his goin' so sudding, leavin' the hosses to the door, an' without sayin' a word to me as he knowed would be frettin' 'bout him."

"Under ordinary circumstances, perhaps, or if he was in his usual state of mind, but in the mood he was in it is the very thing he would do. As I have his lawyer's address, I shall soon know. In the meantime, I want you to keep a sharp watch on Mrs. Bayard's movements. Tell Rattle, when he returns, the same thing. Tell him not to come to

Eagle's Nest, as he proposed, as I don't want him to leave the premises. I shall be here this evening to see him."

CHAPTER XI.

AN HUMBLE BUT TRUE FRIEND.

GERALDINE was not slow to perceive the delay that her brother's conclusions in regard to her husband's mysterious disappearance would give her. She knew that it would not only prevent, for the present at least, any examination of the dungeon below, and which she dreaded more than anything else, but give her opportunity for the flight which was her only hope of safety.

She was strongly impressed by the honesty and goodheartedness of Bridget Connor, especially the affection she evinced for herself, and which was remarkable, considering the short time they had been together.

Taking into view how closely she was watched, and that she would have her baby with her, Geraldine saw how difficult, if not impossible, it would be for her to get away without her assistance.

So she determined to confide in the girl; telling her enough in regard to the danger of her present position to enlist her aid and sympathies.

She had scarcely reached this determination when Bridget entered, her face pale and her manner indicating the utmost fright and consternation.

Alarmed at this unusual demonstration, and all it indicated, Geraldine arose to her feet.

"What has happened, Bridget?"

"Happened, is it?" cried the girl, sinking down into the nearest seat, from pure inability to stand any longer. "The saints be good to us! Oh! wirra! wirra! that iver I shud lave ould Ireland to fall in with a band of thaves an' robbers, for sure an' they ain't no betther, bad luck to the decavin' villins!"

"Don't talk so loudly, Bridget," said her mistress, closing the door; "we don't know who may be listening."

Going to a sideboard, Geralding poured out some wine from a decanter, and bringing it to Bridget, said:

"Drink this, my good girl, and then see if you can't collect yourself sufficiently to tell me what has happened. I am sure that you wouldn't keep anything from me that I ought to know."

"Indade and I wadn't, ma'am, But how can I till ye, poor leddy, that's like a lamb among wolves—if it ain't slanderin' the wild bastes to call thim sech that turn agin their own flesh an' blood! Oh! swate mother! that iver I

shud be at the mercy of sech black-hearted, murtherin' villins!"

Feeling that there was something back of this that she ought to know, and with as little delay as possible, Geraldine endeavored to quiet the girl's agitation, and to lead her thoughts in the right direction.

"Where have you been, Bridget? I sent you downstairs for baby's supper; couldn't you get it?"

This, together with the wine she had drank, had the desired effect.

Putting down her apron from her eyes, the girl said:

"Sure an' there's where I wint, ma'am, jist as straight as I cud go. Findin' nobody in the kitchen, I wint into the panthry, knowin' jist where the milk an' crackers war, to help mesilf. As I was pourin' the milk into the pitcher I heard voices, and lookin' through the panthry winder I see the nagur and Rattle jist forninst it on the porch outside. When I heerd 'em mention your name, ma'am, I pricked up me ears an' listened. I cudn't understand half on it, but it was all about yersilf, it war, an' what a bad woman ye was. Him that they call Rattle said as how he cud till Muster Gaspar—I forgit the name——"

"Gaspardo," interposed Geraldine.

"Yes ma'am, Gusperdo. I heard Rattle say as how he cud tell Muster Gusperdo somethin' that wud make him so mad that he'd aither shoot ye or pit ye back into the cell down suller, where ye was before, kapin' ye on bread an' wather as long as ye lived.

"The nagur was ivery bit as bad as the other one. She said ye'd been the ruin of Masther Robert, an' she hoped to live to dance on yer grave. Sure, an' it made me blood run cowld to hear thim two go on."

The girl was evidently taken aback by the manner in which her mistress received this, who listened gravely, but with no appearance of surprise.

"Sure an' I can't wondher if ye don't belave me, ma'am. I thought I was dramin' mesilf, all the time they wur talkin'. But if it ain't the truth, ivery word av it, may me sowl niver see Saint Pether!"

"I believe all you have told me, Bridget. If I manifest no surprise, it is because I knew before you spoke what bloodthirsty enemies I am in the midst of, and how little mercy I have to expect at their hands. I know how utterly friendless and unprotected I am better than any one can tell me. I have not a friend in the wide world, unless I can call you such. I hope and believe that you are my friend, Bridget?"

That appealing look and tone went straight to that soft Irish heart.

"Indade, an' I am, ma'am. Ye might have mony a frind betther able to hilp ye, but not one more faithfuler. I'll do my bist to sarve ye, ye may be sure of that. But what to do is more'n I can tell, way up here in this God-forsaken place, where there ain't no p'lice, nor law, nor onybody, an' the murtherin' thaves have it all their own way, jist."

"You are right, Bridget; there is no hope for me here. Not only my liberty, but life, depends upon my getting away from this place, and it must be done to-night, or never!"

"Hiven help ye, poor leddy!" responded Bridget, wringing her hands in despair, "but it's small chance ye have of gittin' away, I'm thinkin'. I hard the nagur say that Muster Gusperdo towld 'em to kape a close watch on all yer movements, an' not let yer slip outside av the dure. Sure, an' I think me ears must have decaved me, but I thought I hard ye say he war yer brother?"

"If to be my father's son makes him such, he is my brother, Bridget. But far from expecting any brotherly love or sympathy from him, I would rather be at the mercy of any one else than his; for, from my earliest remembrance, no hand has been so hard and cruel against me as his."

"More shame to him thin! to turn ag'in his own flesh and blood. It's mesilf that belaves that they've murdhered the masther, an' now want to lay the blame on you. 'Cordin' to my way av thinkin', a woman can't have no betther friend—'cept he's a brute right out—thin the father av her childer. If the masther wor here, they wudn't dare to trate ye this way."

It was not the smallest part of the guilty wife's punishment to know that that rash act, instead of making her situation more tolerable, had made it doubly hard and perilous.

No one knew better than she that when the fury of her husband's jealous rage had abated, there would have come some relenting touch of tenderness to soften his heart toward the mother of his boy. That, however hard and stern he might be, he was incapable of abetting or countenancing his cold-blooded cruelty at whose mercy she now was.

Covering her face with her hands, she faltered:

"Don't, don't speak of him! I can't bear it."

Raising her head a few moments later, she added:

"I know as well as you do, Bridget, how closely I am watched. It will be impossible for us to get away through any of the known entrances, as they will be guarded night and day. But I have discovered a secret passage out of the

building that no one knows anything about. If we act prudently, we can escape by that, and be miles and miles away before they miss us. Now go down-stairs and get baby's and my supper; we want to *seem* to retire early. And be sure and not to give Prue the least hint or look to show that you think there's anything wrong."

"Never you fear, ma'am," responded Bridget; "sorra a word or hint will she git out av me."

"Sure, an' it's a tindher heart the mistress has," thought the simple-hearted girl, as she took her way down-stairs. "She can't bear the mintion of her husband's name, poor thing! An' to think av thim two declarin' how she's at the bottom of his disaparence. The swate leddy! that's too gintle an' kind to dale with the likes av 'em. Bad luck to 'em! the murtherin' spalpeens! Won't I be glad enough to git out av their rache, and won't they be mad enough in the morning to find that we've given 'em the slip in spite av all their watchin's and spyin's?"

CHAPTER XII.

GASPARDO'S CONFERENCE WITH RATTLE.

"BE sure and eat a good supper, Bridget," said Geraldine, on that individual's return, bearing a tray containing a number of covered dishes. "We shall have to walk a long distance before coming to where we can take the cars, and shall need all the strength we can muster."

"I hope ye'll take thim words to yersilf, ma'am," responded Bridget, as placing the tray on the round table, she drew it in front of her mistress. "Ye naden't have ony fear av me in the aitin', or slapin' line neither. The saints be praised! I can howld my own in aither respict. But as to yersilf, ma'am, ye don't ate enough to kape a bird alive, lettin' alone a woman with a baby. You shud ate something nourishin', an' plinty av it, so ye shud. It's fitter ye look to be on the bed this minute, thin goin' a journey."

Realizing the good sense as well as good feeling in these words, Geraldine made a strong and successful effort to overcome the repugnance to food that she had felt of late.

Many of the tempting dishes, prepared by the hand of her faithful attendant, had been sent away untasted, while the little nourishment she had taken had been fairly forced down. But now, roused by the stimulus of how much depended on it, our heroine made such an inroad on the liberal supply that Bridget set before her as to fill her honest heart with a joy and satisfaction that found expression in the following words:

"Sure, an' it does me heart good to see ye pluckin' up

an aitin', as a Christian shud. I'll put the rest by fur us to ate on the way. It won't come amiss, I'm thinkin'."

These words had hardly left Bridget's lips when there came a not very gentle rap at the door, which she hastened to open.

It was Rattle, who, looking a little curiously at the rosy and rather defiant face that confronted him, said:

"I want to see your mistress."

The speaker was a strong, sturdy man about thirty, his whole appearance indicating a bull-dog tenacity of purpose, combined with an amount of animal passions which might make him a dangerous person to deal with when they were aroused, though under ordinary circumstances this was not so apparent.

It was evident from the look with which he regarded Geraldine, who now came forward, that he shared old Prue's dislike and distrust of her.

Without waiting for him to speak, Geraldine said:

"I suppose you have come to tell me about Lionel. How is he, and where?"

Rattle was evidently entirely unprepared for this question, his mind being intent on something widely different.

"If the boy's father hain't told you where he is, I hain't likely to," was the sullen response.

Geraldine had already decided on the course of action she would take with her unwelcome visitor.

"If you didn't come to tell me about my boy, for what did you come?" was the sharp and prompt query.

"The lad's safe enough, I made sure of that. I'm a deal more concerned about his father just now. He didn't say nothin' to me 'bout goin' away. I spected he'd be here when I got back. 'Bout what time did you see him last?"

Those dark eyes met with a look of haughty surprise that questioning gaze.

"You strangely forget yourself, Rattle. It is not your place to question me, nor will I suffer it."

Rattle studied the face of the speaker for some moments, but apparently without obtaining anything satisfactory.

"Your brother said he was comin' to see me this evenin', he's got some questions to ask me. It's 'bout time he was here. I thought p'r'aps you had somethin' to say to me afore he come."

Geraldine knew all that this portended, that what the speaker had it in his power to say would heighten to a white heat her brother's rage against her, but she knew, also, that she might as well appeal to the solid rock on which the house was founded as to his heart, whose eyes were fixed so keenly upon her; that the hope that was held

out to her that anything she might say would influence him was merely a trap to lure her to some admission that could be used against her. So, though her heart sank like lead in her bosom, her haughty look did not waver as she said:

"What would I possibly have to say to *you?* You must have a strange idea of our relative positions to suppose such a thing."

A dark, ominous look passed over the man's face at these words.

"You must have a good deal stranger idee if you s'pose your husband's strange an' sudden disappearance is goin' to be passed over in silence. He was a kind, good master to me, an' I ain't goin' to leave a stone unturned to ferret this thing out, you may jist bet your life on that!"

As Geraldine listened to those heavy, retreating footsteps, her heart grew sick with a fear and apprehension, all the more deadly because of its vagueness and uncertainty.

She knew her brother Lorenzo to be capable of terrible things when his anger was fully aroused, as she was conscious it would be if Rattle revealed to him all that had come to his knowledge, but how and in what manner it would vent itself was not so clear. Whether it would be only satisfied with the life, now valueless to her save for the doubly orphaned children, or rest content with taking from that life every pleasant thing, were questions that would not be silenced, but which she found it impossible to answer.

As Geraldine reflected how utterly in the power she was of these bold, bad, brutal men, her thoughts again reverted to the strong arm that she well knew would have defended her against any such cruelty as this, but which was powerless to aid her now.

A heavy groan burst from the lips of the wretched woman, who felt that her punishment was greater than she could bear.

Bridget, who had been present during her mistress' interview with Rattle, could no longer keep silent.

"Sure an' I wouldn't mind what he sez, ma'am, the imperdent blackguard, that hasn't as much manners as a pig! Let him wag his tongue an' plaze himself by talkin', he can't harm ye ony. It's mesilf that hopes that we'll be a good many miles away from this dreadful place by this time to-morrow. If I'd known what it was an' the sort of people I shud find here, I wud never have sot fut in it!"

"Don't talk so loudly, my good girl," said Geraldine, glancing at the door a little apprehensively as she spoke. "If they should have the faintest idea of what I mean to

try to accomplish to-night, our last and only chance of escape will be lost. Take a seat by the balcony-window, and tell me if you see any one coming up the avenue. Don't sit where you can be seen."

Bridget had scarcely taken her seat at the place designated, when a man on horseback made his appearance, riding swiftly up to the main entrance.

The first glance told the girl who it was, Lorenzo Gaspardo's tall, erect figure bringing him very conspicuously into view.

"It's yer brother," she said, returning to where her mistress sat. "Leastways that's what ye called him. A quare brother he is, onyway."

Geraldine's situation was altogether too critical for her to attempt the concealment, to which, under ordinary circumstances, pride would have induced her to resort.

"He is my brother, Bridget—alas for me! alas for us both! I cannot remember that he ever evinced for me the slightest brotherly affection, and to-day there is not a being in the wide world to whom I would not sooner go for aid and protection than he. Keep careful watch, and tell me if you see him leave the house, as, pray Heaven, he may. It will not do for us to commence preparations for our flight until he goes."

Bridget resumed her watch by the window, and, taking Isabel in her arms, Geraldine began to rock her slowly to and fro, her mind too intent on the conference that she knew was being held below for her to share the quiet rest into which the child soon sank, who was too young to be conscious of the perils that menaced it.

As Geraldine sat thus she heard the sound of a heavy step upon the stairs.

Rising to her feet, she clasped her babe more closely to her bosom, as though she thought its innocence and helplessness would insure her some protection. Then, resuming her seat, she nerved herself for the fierce storm that she knew was approaching.

A few moments later the door was flung open, and Lorenzo Gaspardo stood before her, his usually swarthy face white with the fury that raged within, and which found expression in the following words:

"Disgrace to your sex and name! if I do not know as yet their full extent, I know something of your guilt and folly in time to prevent the shame that you seem determined to bring upon all connected with you. Though you have escaped the vengeance of your justly incensed husband, don't think that you will escape *me!*"

"What are you going to do? Whither are you going to take me at this time of night?" shrieked Geraldine,

struggling in the fierce grasp that was endeavoring to drag her toward the door.

"I m going to take you to the dungeon below. You are not altogether unfamiliar with the place, I believe. Whether you escaped by force, fraud, or some foolish relentings on the part of the man you have so basely wronged, you may be sure that no such means will avail with me."

A feeling of unutterable horror took possession of Geraldine at these words.

"Not there, not there!" she cried. "Unless you wish to kill me outright, do not take me there!"

The thought of being thrust into the cell where lay the body of her murdered husband—murdered by her own hand—was too much for the nervous system, already strained to its utmost tension, unconsciousness coming mercifully to her relief.

Gaspardo gazed unmercifully at the white face that was lying at his feet, and then glanced up at Rattle, who was now standing in the open doorway.

"Bear a hand, man. She's quiet enough, now, and we'll get her down there without any more outcry and ado. Let old Prue go ahead with the light and open the door."

Rushing past Rattle, Prue now stood beside the speaker, her eyes, as they rested upon Geraldine's prostrate form, glancing with a look of mingled curiosity and triumph.

"The door of the cell is locked, and the key ain't to be found nowhere."

"Not to be found?" echoed Gaspardo, in a tone of surprise. "A key that would turn a lock like that could hardly get astray. What do you think has become of it?"

"I do' know. At first I thought *she* had it"—pointing to Geraldine—"but latterly I'm of the 'pinion that Marse Robert tuck it away with him—if so be he did go. I minded that he allus kept that key himself."

Rattle now spoke.

"I don't b'lieve there's any danger of her gittin' away from here, sir; not if the back winders is nailed down, an' a sharp watch kept in front. I'll take an impression of the lock in the mornin', an' git a key made."

"I suppose that is the best thing that can be done now," said Gaspardo, making a careful survey around. "I shall trust to you to have everything safe and secure."

"Here, girl," he added, addressing Bridget, who, during this exciting scene, had been kneeling, or rather crouching, in the furthest corner of the room, uttering prayers and ejaculations to all the saints she could think of, interspersed with smothered moans, occasioned by the fright that had seized her. "Here, girl, stop that noise, and

come at once and attend to your mistress. You are not hurt or going to be hurt. You'll be locked up here to-night. To-morrow morning you'll be paid a month's wages, blindfolded and taken to a certain point down the river, where, if you are wise enough to keep your own counsel, you will be allowed to go where you please.

"I shall look to you to attend to this, Rattle."

The man nodded.

And without a glance at the insensible form lying there so white and still, Lorenzo Gaspardo left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

GERALDINE'S FLIGHT.

WHEN Geraldine awoke to consciousness she found her faithful handmaid almost in despair at her long swoon.

With the dim feeling that something terrible had or was about to happen, she raised her hand to her forehead, gasping:

"What is it—where am I?"

"The saints be praised!" sobbed Bridget. "Sure, an' I thought that ye'd niver open your eyes or spake again."

Slowly it all came back to the wretched woman. Lifting her head, she looked shudderingly around.

"Have they really gone? Won't they be back to drag me down to that dreadful place?"

"They'd do it if they cud; it's no thanks to thim that ye ain't there now. I hard thim talkin' betwixt thimsilves that the kay av it was lost. Sure, an' it's mesilf that hopes that it will kape lost."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Geraldine, as her head sank wearily back upon the pillow. "I think that I should die or go mad if I was taken there. If it were not for my poor baby, death would be a welcome release. But for her sake I must live; for her sake I must try to circumvent and escape from my cruel enemies."

"Cruel is the right name fur 'em," exclaimed Bridget, wringing her hands in despair. "Oh! wirra! wirra! that iver I should fall into the hands of such murtherin' villyuns as thim!"

"You have no occasion to fear, my good girl," interposed Geraldine, roused from the contemplation of her own misery by the terror so plainly depicted by every look and tone of the speaker, who had flung herself down beside the bed. "It is I whom they hate and persecute; no harm will come to you."

"Ye wudn't be so sure av that if ye'd hard your brother's words, whin ye lay faintin' on the flure. He said I'd stay here the night, an' in the mornin' be tuck to some lonely

place down the river, where, if I'll promise niver to revale their wicked doin's, they'll set me free. They'll silence me tongue by murdherin' me, more like!"

"So my cruel brother intends to deprive me of my only friend," said Geraldine, with a sad smile. "For you have been a true and kind friend to me, Bridget: situated as I am, I don't know how I should have got along without you."

These words went straight to that honest and kindly heart.

"Sure, an' I'd like to sarve ye to the end of me days, if so be I cud. If they'd let me, I'd stay with ye whativir come. Not that I'd be able to help ye ony; it's little that one man cud do against so many, let alone a woman. If I got clear of thim, isn't there some frind of yours that I cud sind word to?"

"No one; the only relatives that I have in the world are my brothers, if such they can be called. Besides, they will not set you free unless you take a solemn oath not to betray them."

The girl glanced up in some surprise at the speaker.

"An' do ye think it wud be bindin' on me conscience to kape it, ma'am, whin it's forced from ye, an' by sich divils as thim?"

"Perhaps not. It might be even wrong for you to keep it, if so be you could do any good by breaking it. In this instance it could be of no avail. What they have to do will be done too quickly and effectually for any help to reach me in that way."

A look of horror overspread the girl's face.

"The saints be good to us, sure, an' ye don't think they mane to murther ye, ma'am?"

A faint smile touched Geraldine's lips.

"They may not call it by such an ugly name, Bridget. By some strange process of reasoning, they may consider that they are meting out to me the punishment that I deserve. This I know, that my brothers intend to either take my life or to consign me to a living tomb."

"Swate mother! did iver ony one hear the like?" ejaculated Bridget, with uplifted hands. "They'll take me away in the mornin', an' I'll nivir know what become of ye."

"Never fear, Bridget, you follow my directions, and we won't either of us be here in the morning. So get up on to your feet, my good girl, and take courage."

"Sure an' there's nothin' I'd like bether," responded Bridget, as she obeyed. "But how we are to git away, with the dure locked on the outside an' all the windies nailed down, is more than I can till."

Making a strong and successful effort to overcome the faintness that benumbed limb and brain, Geraldine moved

across the room to the toilet-table, where she began to bathe her face and head in the cool, fresh water there.

'Are the windows nailed down?" she said, as she took the towel from Bridget's hand.

"Indade, an' they be, ma'am. Whin I was tryin' to bring ye to, an' thinkin' I never cud, in comes Rattle, hammerin' away at 'em, as though he liked nothin' better. Bad luck to him! It's me b'lafe that he's as bad as Muster Gaspardo, ivery bit. And as for the nagur, she's a dale worse than aither av 'em."

"Never mind about the windows, Bridget," responded her mistress, reassuringly; "we are not going out that way.

"You foolish girl," she added, as she looked upon Bridget's disturbed face, "have you forgotten how high up we are, and the jagged rocks below? It would be almost certain death for us to attempt it. It is in our favor that they have taken all these precautions, as, believing that they have made everything secure, they will keep no watch on our movements, leaving me free to carry out my plan. The time to do this must be close at hand. My watch has stopped; go into the next room and see what time it is."

"It's half-past 'leven, ma'am," said Bridget, on her return, upon whose spirits Geraldine's hopeful words had a most happy effect, as could be seen by her tone and movements.

"Then we have just time to get ready," responded Geraldine, "as we must leave a little after midnight. Get the dark lantern from the closet where you hid it.

"We must put the other lights out," continued Geraldine, as she proceeded to light the lantern, "and talk very low, so that they will think we are sleeping."

Geraldine's next move was in the direction of a desk.

The pressure of a spring brought some bank-bills and gold into view.

"We shall need money," she said, as she put them in her purse. "If ever we get to the outside world again we shall find it to be as good a friend as we can have."

"It's a lucky thing that ye've got it, ma'am," responded Bridget, her eyes resting a little longingly upon the glittering coin.

Perhaps Geraldine observed this, for taking two gold eagles she put them in the girl's hand.

"You had better take this. I pray Heaven that we may not become separated; but, if we should be, I shall feel better to know that you have it with you. Sew it up in your dress, so that it will not be taken from you. Then bring baby to me, being careful not to wake her."

The girl obeyed all her mistress' directions, the two working together with so much quietness and celerity, that when the large clock in the hall below tolled forth the hour of twelve all their preparations were completed.

When Geraldine had made sure of this she bade Bridget assist her in removing from its place in one corner of the room a cumbrous, old-fashioned secretary, whose top reached nearly to the ceiling.

This had to be done with great care and caution, lest some sound should reach those outside.

This ancient piece of furniture concealed a secret door, of which no one else in the house, not even its late master, had any knowledge.

Geraldine had discovered it months before, as she was rummaging through the house in one of her restless moods, never speaking of it to any one.

The opening of this door revealed some steep and narrow stairs, leading downward, made, apparently, of solid stone.

At the sight of this Bridget could not help uttering an ejaculation of astonishment and delight, but which was quickly checked by her mistress.

"We are by no means out of the woods yet, having many dangers as well as hardships before us. Everything depends on our having a fair start; any unusual sound or movement will betray us."

Geraldine would gladly have returned the secretary to its place, so as to have concealed their way of escape, but this was impossible, there being no one on the other side to do this. But she darkened the room, drawing the secretary as near to the door as she could, and leave sufficient room to pass through, hoping, at least, to delay the discovery.

The two now commenced this steep and perilous descent into they knew not what, so intense was the darkness below and around them, and which the faint light they carried made little more than visible.

Bridget went before with the lantern, Geraldine following with little Isabel in her arms, whom she would not trust out of them at such a time as this.

The stairs, which were very long, had evidently not been used for some time, being covered with a fine, soft dust. Further down, the dampness had formed it into a sort of slime, which would have been dangerous had it not been for the roughness of the way, which prevented the feet from slipping.

After going down forty or fifty steps in straight descent, they came to a landing, or rather narrow passage-way, which led directly forward to another stairs very similar

in appearance, and full as long, as they found out as they took their way down.

When they came to the second landing the murmuring sound of water could be distinctly heard in the distance.

"What's that rushing sound that I hear?" inquired Bridget, who had sat herself down upon the last stair, intent on having a "breathin' spell" as she called it, before going any further.

"It is the river," replied Geraldine. "We must be very near it now."

The third flight of stairs was somewhat shorter, leading directly down to the water.

As they neared the bottom the steps grew very moist, while a damp chilliness pervaded the air.

A few moments later Geraldine stood upon the last step, looking out upon the river that was moving swiftly past, and which presented such a formidable barrier to any further progress.

"Good fathers!" ejaculated Bridget, holding up her hands, "how iver are we to git acrass the river, when ther's niver a boat or bridge, or onybody to hilp us?"

There was considerable space where the stairs ended; the entrance, opening out upon the river, being broad and a little lower, the water entered it part way. It gradually arose until it reached the stairs, forming what seemed like a small cave, whether natural or artificial it was not easy for Geraldine to decide from the small amount of light afforded by the lantern, and which Bridget was swinging about, taking a careful survey of their new and strange quarters, so far as the darkness would admit.

Suddenly she uttered an exclamation of joy.

"D'ye see that, ma'am?"

On looking in the direction in which the girl pointed, Geraldine saw a small skiff, or what looked like one, in the dim light.

On examining it more closely Geraldine saw that it was whole, though very old, having the appearance of not having been in the water for a long time.

It was not heavy, and by their united strength they succeeded in dragging it to the water's edge.

Here the light of the moon, which now emerged from a cloud, enabled them to obtain a clearer idea of its condition.

It was not only small and frail, but the wood considerably decayed from its long disuse, though there were no serious leaks in it.

As Geraldine looked at it she glanced in dismay at Bridget's plump, buxom form, which was all of a third heavier than her own.

Without communicating her fears to the girl, she assisted her in pushing the boat off, and then, in order to test it, stepped in.

The result showed that it was all that it would safely bear, that the addition of twenty more pounds would sink it.

Bridget was not slow to interpret the perplexity and disappointment so clearly expressed in her mistress' face.

"Sit ye down, ma'am. It will bear yerself an' the babby, but niver a bit more will it howld."

"And leave you here, my good girl, after all your faithfulness and devotion? I can't find it in my heart to do that."

"Ye can't do onything else, ma'am," said the girl, stoutly. "The boat won't hold us both, that's aisy seen, an' your stayin' here will make it a dale worse for you, an' not the laste bit betther for me. It's you that thim ugly divils hate; they won't be bothered with the loikes of me at all, at all."

There was sound sense in this, and as Geraldine looked down upon her baby, her resolution wavered.

"But what will you do? Go back to where we came from?"

"Av course. An' whin I once git there I'll fix the sacret dure so they won't mistrust there bein' ony, an' thin go to bed as if nothin' had happened. And in the morning, when they find ye gone, I'll pretind to be as much astonished as thim."

Geraldine's countenance showed that she did not share in the confidence of the speaker.

"I will not deceive you, my poor girl; my brother will be very angry at my escape, and will be likely to visit his anger on you. He can do dreadful things when he is angry."

There must have been an heroic element under that rough exterior, for, though the rosy cheeks paled a little at all that this implied, her resolution did not falter.

"I'll take me chances. They can't more nor kill me. It's an aven chance, onyway, to be drowned or to fall into the hands of thim divils. Don't ye be afther worryin', ma'am. It's me belafe that your brother will let me go, whin he sees that there's nothin' to be gained by kaping me. It can't be fur from mornin', so it's time ye was off. Sit as much as ye can in the middle of the boat, an' I'll give it a shove. Ye can't row ag'inst the current, ye'll have to float down the sthrame, kapin' as near as ye can to the shore. Ye had betther land as soon as ye can do so safely; the boat is nothin' but a shell, an' won't take ye tur."

Parting under such peculiar circumstances, neither of

them knew what would befall the other, or if ever they should meet again.

Their common perils and sufferings had thrown down the barriers growing out of their respective positions, and there were tears in Geraldine's eyes as she felt the parting grasp of the hand that had been so kind and helpful.

As for Bridget, her sobs were audible, in which there was a curious mingling of blessings on the head of her mistress and anathemas against her enemies.

Leaning over the water, Bridget watched the frail boat, with its precious freight, until it disappeared around a bend in the river.

Hearing a step back of her, she turned round, beholding at a few feet distant the pale face and hollow eyes, turned directly toward her, of a tall, gaunt figure which looked more like a ghost than a living man.

Believing it to be such, the terrified girl gave a loud screech, and for the first time in all her healthy, hardy life tumbled over in a swoon.

CHAPTER XIV.

GASPARDO'S CONSTERNATION AND RAGE.

As soon as Bridget had recovered sufficiently to realize her surroundings, she sat up and looked tremblingly around. But not a trace could be seen of the dread specter —as she considered it—that had so frightened her.

Nor could a sound be heard but the murmur of the river that glided past, upon whose waters the rays of the moon glittered that was shining so tranquilly in the heavens above.

Far from having her apprehensions allayed, a still more deadly terror seized the girl.

"It was a ghost," she muttered. "Howly Mother, defind us!"

Seizing the lantern and not daring to cast a glance around, lest she should be struck motionless by some vision of terror, Bridget began to ascend the stairs as fast as her trembling limbs would admit.

She found no difficulty in finding her way back to the place she had quitted a few hours before, finding everything exactly as she left it.

Her first move after closing the door was to endeavor to return the secretary to its place in front of it. But it was old and cumbrous, and in endeavoring to push it back one of the legs came off.

After various fruitless efforts, to the imminent danger of breaking the other legs, Bridget was obliged to relinquish her design.

So contenting herself with propping it up on one side, which was the best she could do under the circumstances, the girl went to bed; being too "complately wayried out," to use her own words, "to drag one fut after the other."

Crawling between the blankets, she fell into such a deep, heavy slumber that she was conscious of nothing until she felt the grasp of a strong hand upon her shoulder.

Bridget's first thought, as she looked up to that dark, angry face, was that her last hour had come.

"Mercy, mercy!" she shrieked. "Don't be afther murderin' a poor girl, that niver did ye a bit of harm in her loife!"

"What has become of your mistress?" thundered Gaspardo, who, still retaining his grasp of the girl's shoulder, emphasized his words by a series of shakes that made her teeth chatter with something besides fright.

"Oh! ow! ow! O!-o-o-o-o!" continued Bridget, with a rising inflection. "Must I be murthered in me bed and nobody hilp me?"

"Will you stop your howling and answer me?" responded Gaspardo, with an oath. "Again I ask, where is your mistress?"

Fortunately for the part Bridget was to act, sleep and terror had swept the events of the past night for the time being completely from her mind.

The bewilderment in her honest face was too genuine to be counterfeited, as she said:

"An' where shud she be but in her own room at this toime av the day?"

Gaspardo's belief that the girl had connived at Geraldine's escape was evidently staggered as he looked at her.

"She isn't in her room, she's gone," was the gloomy response. "Do you mean to say that you know nothing about it?"

The occurrences of the preceding night instantly flashed upon Bridget's mind, but she was cunning enough to follow up her advantage.

Turning toward the window, through which the rays of the rising sun fell brightly, Gaspardo raised his hand, muttering hoarsely:

"She's got away; I'd have given my right hand to have prevented it."

"Sure, an' how cud she get away, with the dure locked an' all the windys nailed down?" interposed Bridget, with an innocent air.

"True enough," exclaimed Gaspardo, turning to Rattle, who stood leaning against the door; "it's a sheer impossibility. She must be secreted in the room; search every place and corner."

Both men had gone through every room, but they now commenced a still more thorough search.

Observing something peculiar about the secretary, Gaspardo approached it.

As he laid his hand on it the prop came out, and it fell over with a heavy crash.

Though this brought the place where the secret door was into view, Gaspardo did not at once discover it; being, at first, too much startled at so sudden and unexpected an occurrence to think of anything else.

But a little reflection led him to believe that it had something to do with his sister's mysterious disappearance, and a thorough examination gave him the key to it all.

"Here it is; here is where she got out!" cried Gaspardo, as opening the secret door he looked out into the passage. "There must be some stairs here. Let us see where they lead to. Get a lantern; it is as dark as Egypt."

As Rattle turned to obey this order, he stumbled against the lantern that had been used the preceding night, Bridget having brought it back with her.

Hastily lighting it, the two men, forgetting everything else in their eagerness to follow up this clew, disappeared through the secret door.

As soon as they were gone, Bridget commenced dressing with the utmost dispatch.

"They've gone, the murtherin' thaves! bad luck go with 'em! Hiven send that the poor, swate leddy is too fur away fur thim to git howld av her, an' git me safe out av this. Now's me chance, if I'm ever to git clare av 'em."

Bridget had tied on her hat, and was huddling together a few of her "duds," as she called them, when she caught a glimpse of a dark-looking object in the doorway.

It was old Prue, who stood regarding her with a suspicious and sinister roll to her eyes.

"Humph! so ye's going to leave us?"

Bridget took a critical survey of the speaker, whose form, though strong and wiry for her age, she felt was no match for hers.

Being confident, in a hand-to-hand tussle—which was all that she had to fear—that she would come out victor, she said, boldly:

"Yes, I be; an' I ain't none too sorry, aither."

"Did Marse Gaspardo say ye could go?"

"Not being a Hottentot or nagur, I didn't ask him," retorted Bridget, with a toss of the head. "He ain't no masther av mine. I hired out to Muster Bayard to take care av the babby, an' now that its ma has tuck it away, I hain't no call to stay ony longer."

"That's all ye know 'bout it," responded Prue, darkly.

"The baby 'ill be brung back, and its ma, too. Marse Gaspardo's boun' to ketch 'em. Dey ain't gon· to slip out of his hands so easy, you jist bet yer life on that; you take my 'vice, and stop where ye am. If Marse Gaspardo comes back, an' finds ye gone, it'll be the wuss for ye."

"It'll be the worse fur me if I stay, I'm thinkin'," was the girl's inward reflection, as, seizing her bundle, she turned to the door.

Then dropping an ironical courtesy to Prue, whose countenance showed plainly her anger, she added, aloud:

"I'm sorry to refuse yer pressin' invitation, ma'am. Ye are sech a plisant, agraerble person that me heart's quite broke at the thought of partin' from ye. But I wouldn't live a day longer here fur me weight in goold. Till Muster Gaspardo that I thought I'd save him the trouble of blindin' me eyes an' lavin' me in some strange place. That now the misthress is gone, I'm too glad to git away mesilf to till av his tratement av his own flesh an' blood, which was more loike a wild Injin than a brother. So good-bye t' ye."

In the meantime, Gaspardo and Rattle had taken themselves down the three long flights of stairs which led to the river.

Strong in the hope of reclaiming his prisoner, the former stared blankly at the water that barred his further progress.

"She can't swim; and then she had the child with her," he said, apparently as much at a loss as ever.

But Rattle's keener eyes had detected the marks that the boat made, as it was dragged to and lowered to the water.

"Do you see that, sir," he said to Gaspardo, "and those fresh foot-prints? There's been some heavy thing dragged along here; a boat of some kind, I should say, by the looks."

Gaspardo's face darkened.

"She must be pursued," he cried with an oath. "She can't have got very far, with the child to carry. Which way do you suppose she has gone, up or down?"

Rattle mused a moment.

"Was she used to rowing?"

"Never used the oars in her life, that I know of."

"Then, most likely, she went down the river, and not very far by boat. We could be surest of ketchin' her by takin' a direct course south, on horseback, than any other way."

This sounded very plausible, and they quickly retraced their way.

There were two fleet horses in the stable, and these were soon saddled and at the door.

As Gaspardo was about to mount his, old Prue touched his arm.

"The gal's gone."

In his eagerness to recover his escaped prisoner he had forgotten all about Bridget.

He turned an impatient look upon the speaker.

"What girl?'

"The nuss-gal."

Gaspardo's countenance changed. He realized the imprudence of allowing the girl to be at large at this time, especially if any way inclined to be communicative.

"Gone, is she? That's bad. I meant to have had her locked up. Did she say anything when she left?"

"She talked sassy enough," responded the old negress, sulkily; "she was a sassy piece, anyway, sidin' with her mistress from the fust."

"Which way did she go?"

"I do' know. She went down the main avenue, an' that's the last I seed of her."

"Well, it can't be helped. I have more important business to attend to now. We may come across her. Come, Rattle."

And urging their horses to their utmost speed, the two men disappeared amid the shadows of the trees and rocks with which the place abounded.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FUGITIVE.

We will now return to Geraldine, whom we left gliding down the river in a boat, whose frail timbers were all that lay between her and a watery grave.

As she glanced up at the grim-looking building, now so high above her head that she had to look straight up at it, she clasped her babe to her bosom, her heart overflowing with devout thankfulness at her escape from the scene of so much wretchedness and peril.

Not a light could be seen; solitary and stern it frowned darkly upon her, as though cognizant of the terrible tragedy that had been enacted within its walls.

With a slight shiver, caused by something more than the chilliness of the night, Geraldine drew her mantle more closely around her, glad when a bend in the river hid it from her sight.

"God grant that I may never see that dreadful place again," she thought, "or anybody belonging to it."

Following Bridget's advice, she kept as near to the banks of the river as she safely could, her heart growing lighter

and lighter as the current bore her further and further away.

It was her intention to cross the river when she got to where there was no danger of her being seen from Hunter's Lodge, whose elevated position gave it an extended view, especially in that direction.

If pursued, as she knew she would be, there would be less danger of her being taken.

But very fortunately, as, if she had been further from the shore her death would have been certain, just as she was about to make the attempt the boat sprung a leak, filling so rapidly that she barely succeeded in reaching the land.

Five minutes later, standing on the shore, she saw it sink beneath the water.

Exhausted by the effort it had cost her, as well as chilled by the water that had wet her feet and garments, Geraldine seated herself beneath a tree and began to wring out the dripping folds of her dress.

Then she looked around.

There was no house or any signs of life visible in any direction. There was nothing but an extended sweep of hills and depressions, broken here and there by rocks and clumps of trees.

It was her aim to reach some town on the river, which would afford her an opportunity of traveling, either by boat or car, she did not care in what direction, if it only took her away from her cruel enemies.

Unfortunately for the carrying out of this plan, Geraldine had been kept so closely that she was entirely ignorant as to whither to direct her steps.

She knew that the nearest village from Hunter's Lodge was up the river. It was nearly three miles distant, and rarely visited by any of its inmates, Mr. Bayard getting all his supplies direct from New York.

But she was too far down the river now for her to take the cars from that place, even if it had not been attended with too much danger for her to attempt it.

So her only resource was to go as directly south as possible.

Knowing that all the large towns were on the river, she would have kept alongside of it but for the fear that if search was made for her, it would be likely to be in that vicinity.

So she struck across the fields away from it, but still taking a southerly direction.

Geraldine avoided the highway for the same reason.

At first, nerved on by the fears that would not let her rest, she walked briskly along, scarcely feeling the weight

of the babe in her arms, except to feel what a precious weight it was.

But weak from all the hardships she had undergone, her footsteps soon began to lag, and she was obliged to make frequent pauses for rest. Still, as she persistently pushed ahead, her progress, though slow, was considerable, and she would have been greatly encouraged had she not felt her strength gradually giving way.

To add to her troubles, Isabel began to fret and cry, from the combined discomforts of hunger and cold, together with the constrained position in which she was held.

The suddenness with which the boat had sprung a leak had prevented Geraldine securing the food that Bridget had provided, so that she had none to give her.

So, soothing the little creature as best she could, she walked wearily on, having now struck into a narrow wood-path that ran the other side of a fence that separated it from the highway.

It was the first time she had ventured so near to the public road, she making this change in the hope of reaching some farm-house, where she might procure a drink of milk for her babe, it being now near morning.

But it was in vain that she strained her weary gaze in every direction; not a house was to be seen.

Finally, too faint and weary to go further, she seated herself upon a stone, forgetting her own peril in her anxieties for her child, whose cries had subsided into moans that went straight to the mother's heart.

"My poor baby," she murmured, "have we escaped so many perils to die of hunger and cold in these dreary woods?"

The dawn was just reddening in the east, and soon the sun arose, clear and bright, and casting a cheering radiance on everything around her.

But its rays brought to poor Geraldine nothing but fear and gloom.

"They have probably missed me by this time," she thought, "and I must not linger here. If I only had something to allay this tormenting thirst."

As this thought passed through her mind, to her great joy, she heard the murmuring sound of a brook near by.

Going to it, she scooped up some of the water with her hands, drinking eagerly of it and giving some to Isabel.

Feeling considerably refreshed, she went on; though obliged to pause for rest many times, she made but a slow progress.

The sun was now high in the heavens, and not a house visible, when a sturdy, tow-headed boy came whistling along the road.

Geraldine's hopes revived at this sight.

Going to the fence, she called to him.

Suddenly stopping, the boy stared with open eyes and mouth at "the pretty lady," as he afterward called her.

"Can you tell me where the nearest station, steamboat landing or ferry is?"

"The landin' an' ferry is a good three mile from here. You'll hev to cross the river to git the cars."

Feeling that she could not go half or quarter of that distance without food and rest, Geraldine leaned heavily against the fence by which she stood.

There was something in the honest face of the lad that won her confidence.

"That is a long way, and I am very tired. Can you tell me of some house near by, where the people are kind and good, and where my baby and I can get some food and rest a little?"

"A'nt Jane's the kindest body I know on," responded the boy, after a thoughtful pause, "but she lives a mile back, on the river. Mr. Burchard's house ain't fur off; you kin see it when you git down to the turn. He ain't bad, the old man ain't, 'cept when he gits riled, an' his wife is tiptop. *She'll* give you somethin' to eat. Le' me hold the baby while you get over the fence. Wait, an' I'll let down the bars."

Geraldine passed out into the road, the two walking along together, her guide carrying the baby, as she was very glad to have him do, it being only with difficulty that she kept upon her feet.

"How pretty 'tis—most as pretty as you be," said the boy, looking up at Geraldine with such a look of honest admiration in his honest blue eyes that it called a faint smile to her lips.

"What is your name?" she said, placing her hand lightly on the unkempt locks.

"Robert—they call me Bob, for short."

"Well, Robert, you look like a kind, good boy. You wouldn't do me any harm, I am sure?"

The boy looked amazed.

"Of course not. Nobody could harm ye."

Geraldine shook her head.

"I don't know about that. I am trying to get away from some bad and cruel men. Should they come along and ask you if you had seen me, as they may, it might do me a great deal of harm if you should tell them where I am."

The boy was quick-witted enough to take in the purport of this.

"I won't tell, I won't tell anybody," he replied, with an earnestness that showed that he meant what he said.

"There's the house," he added, pointing to a pleasant looking farm-house, half-hidden by trees and shrubbery. "And there's the old man at the well, drawin' a pail o' water."

They were standing on a little eminence, and shading his eyes with his hand, Bob cast a searching look backward.

"There's two men on horseback, yander."

"Where, where?" cried Geraldine, turning her eyes in the same direction.

"There, on the cross-road. Don't you see 'em? They are comin' down the hill, lickety-cut!"

"Merciful Father!" ejaculated Geraldine, trembling in every limb, "it is, it must be my cruel enemies! How can I escape; what can I do?"

"Don't you be none afeard, ma'am," responded Bob, coolly; *I*'ll 'tend to em. All *you*'ve got to do is to walk into that house, an' git somethin' t' eat. Tell the folks Bob Martin sent ye, an' they'll show ye every 'tention."

Opening the gate Bob put the baby in its mother's arms, and then walked up the road toward where the two horsemen had been seen, but who were now temporarily hidden from view by the friendly shadow of some intervening trees.

With a rushing sound in her ears, a mist before her eyes, Geraldine staggered, rather than walked, up the path to the house.

So that when the master of it walked up to the porch, with the dripping pail in his hand, he stared in amazement at the heap that lay there, so limp and motionless.

"Good gracious me! mother! mother!" he shouted, "come here, quick! Here's a woman and a baby, dead or dying; I don't know which."

In the meantime little Isabel, having rolled away from those nerveless arms, set up a loud and plaintive wail.

These combined outcries brought to the door a pleasant-faced, matronly-looking woman, whose experienced eye soon took in the situation.

Bidding her eldest girl pick up the baby, by her husband's help, Geraldine was soon transferred from the porch to the neat, cozy-looking bedroom opening out of the "spare room."

Breaking from its confinement, the long, dark hair fell around the beautiful face, making it look still more white and deathly.

"I swow, if I don't believe she's dead, wife," said Mr.

Burchard, who stood at the foot of the bed watching that individual's energetic efforts to restore consciousness.

Drawing a long, shuddering sigh, Geraldine now opened her eyes, fixing them with a frightened air upon Mr. Burchard's round, rubicund face.

"No, she ain't dead," responded the good woman. "Go away, father, do. 'Tain't no place for men-folks. She's comin' to, and will be frightened to see so many strange faces.

"Tom and Sammy, you go out, an' see that you don't make a bit of noise. Salmanthy, you kin stay an' help me."

Geraldine relapsed into half-unconsciousness, while kind and gentle hands removed the torn and drabbled dress, whose costliness called forth many an exclamation of admiration and wonder.

"All silk an' velvet, just see, ma!" said Salmanthy, holding it up.

"An' the shoes are kid, lined with satin," said the mother, as she took them off; "all cut they be an' torn, as if she had walked a long way. Poor, pretty dear! I wonder who she kin be. She belongs to some rich family, that's certain."

At this moment Geraldine opened her eyes again, looking up appealingly into the kind face that was bending over her.

"You won't let them take me away?"

At first the woman looked puzzled, then suspecting, from the wild glitter in the eyes, that her mind was wandering, said, soothingly:

"No, no, dearie, there sha'n't nobody take you away."

"Where's my baby?"

"Oh, baby's all right. Hepsey's got her in the kitchen, givin' her some bread an' milk, an' it would do your heart good to see her eat. Hepsey is the best hand I know of to take care of babies. Now, *you* must eat somethin'.

"Salmanthy, go into the kitchen and git me a hot, strong cup of coffee, with plenty of cream an' sugar in it, an' some of that new white bread an' fresh butter."

The coffee was delicious, and the bread and butter the sweetest that Geraldine had ever eaten, or else they seemed so from her long fast, and she partook of them with a relish that was very satisfactory to her kind hostess.

Then, too tired and weak even to think connectedly, she fell into a deep slumber.

In the meantime Bob pursued his way up the road, feeling bigger, stronger, and of more importance than he ever felt before in his life, with the thought of being installed

protector of the pretty lady, whose lovely face and gentle words and ways had made such a strong impression on his boy-heart.

"Gorry!" he exclaimed, "if she don't jest look like one of them pictures that I see in the store-winders when I went to 'Kipsie."

His eye catching the glitter of something lying by the roadside, he picked it up.

It proved to be a beautifully embossed portemonnaie full of bank bills and gold.

"It must be hers," he said, thrusting it under his torn jacket. "I'll keep it and give it to her."

At this moment the two horsemen came in sight.

Planting himself by the roadside, with his back toward them, with the air of one either entirely unconscious or indifferent to their movements, Bob awaited their approach.

"Ef they ask me anythin', ef I don't put them on the wrong scent, my name ain't Bob Martin!" was his inward reflection.

The taller of the two horsemen drew his rein as soon as he saw him.

"My lad, have you seen a lady on the road anywhere about here, this morning?"

Bob honored the speaker with a prolonged stare, as if desirous of knowing him again when he saw him.

"Was it a real pretty lady with black eyes and hair?"

"Yes. Tell me where you saw her, and you shall have this," said Gaspardo, holding up a silver dollar.

"Did she have a baby in her arms?"

"Yes; yes!" was the impatient response; "that is the one. Where is she?"

"I don't know where she is now," drawled the boy, speaking with a slowness and deliberation in strong contrast to the fierce impatience in the look and tone of his questioner. "I see such a lookin' lady 'bout three miles down the road. She asked me how fur it was to the landin', an' I said——"

The men did not wait for the speaker to finish his sentence, but urged their horses forward in the direction toward which the lad pointed.

Bob picked up the coin that was flung at his feet, a knowing twinkle in his eye as he rubbed the dust off with the sleeve of his jacket.

"I bet a cooky that they'll be in too much of a hurry to stop at Mr. Burchard's, but I guess I'll jest foller on an' see."

CHAPTER XVI.

HUNTED DOWN.

As Bob reached Mr. Burchard's house. to his great satisfaction no one was visible except Mr. Burchard, who was leaning against the gate.

"How's the lady I sent ye?"

The man looked surprised at this query.

"Did *you* send her? Where on earth did she come from?"

"I do' know more'n the man in the moon. I found her a piece back, settin' by the roadside clean tuckered out. Said she hadn't had nothin' t'eat sence yisterday; so I sent her to you. Knowed you'd be glad to give her a good turn."

"Sartin, sartin, my boy; glad you did. I found her tumbled down in a heap on the porch. I declare for't ef I didn't think she was dead when I looked at her. Wife an' me got her on the bed, an' she's fast asleep now."

"When she wakes, tell her that I'm goin' to get Uncle Jake's team an' take her to the landin' to-night; there's where she wants to go. Now you take good care on her. She's somebody, you'd better believe; a real lady, ef there ever was one. And a word in your ear, old man. Don't let on to nobody that she's there. She's layin' low, D'ye understand?"

These words, and the knowing wink that accompanied them, combined to mystify Burchard more than ever, whose head was none of the clearest.

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, but I do, though," responded Bob, moving along. "I've got to go to the 'Corners' to help Silas Badger haul logs; when I git back I'll tell you more; you stan' by the poor lady; you won't lose nothin' by't, now I tell you."

Perhaps Bob had in view the purse, heavy with gold, and whose weight he could feel as he spoke, but he was too shrewd to give any information of his "find," or let it pass out of his hands.

"When I come to take her to the landin' I'll give it to her," was his inward reflection, his heart swelling with boyish pride at the thought of the consequence it would give him in her eyes.

In the meantime, Gaspardo and Rattle pursued their rapid way to the next village, keeping a sharp lookout for the person described by Bob, but without coming across any one in the least resembling her.

After making sure that there was no one at the ferry or landing, Gaspardo left his companion at the former place —knowing that no boat left until evening—and carefully

retraced his way, being strongly impressed with the feeling that he had either gone in the wrong direction or missed the object of his search some way.

On reaching Mr. Burchard's house, he saw a girl at the gate with a child in her arms, whose appearance arrested his attention.

"Is that child your little sister?" he asked.

"No, sir," said the girl, bashfully, "it belongs to the strange lady."

"What strange lady?"

"The one that come this morning."

"So there's a strange lady with you?" continued Gaspardo, speaking in the softest of tones, but his eyes gleaming with exultation, as he spoke. "Is she pretty, with dark eyes and hair, like this little one here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is she now?" said Gaspardo, speaking in the same soft, silky tone, slipping a piece of silver in the girl's hand.

The girl examined the coin with an expression of pleased interest, dropping a courtesy of thanks, as she said:

"She's in the 'spare bedroom' asleep, so mam said."

"So she is in the 'spare bedroom,' asleep? She is very tired, I dare say. You are a good girl, a *very* good girl, and won't disturb her, I know. Is that your father who is smoking on the porch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ask him to step down to the gate, a moment. And mind," he smiled, as the girl turned to obey, lifting up his forefinger to emphasize his words, "mind that you don't disturb the strange lady."

Gaspardo's position was admirably adapted to secure his object, which was to avoid being seen by any one inside, there being an abundance of shrubbery near the gate, and a large tree just outside of it, in the shadow of which he stood.

Pipe in hand, Mr. Burchard came down the path to the gate.

"I wish to thank you, sir, for your kindness and humanity in taking in and caring for my poor, unhappy sister."

The look of subdued sorrow in Gaspardo's face, as he said this, would have deceived a shrewder man than the old farmer.

"So the sick lady is your sister? Mighty glad to hear it. The poor critur needs some one to look arter her, if any one do."

"Very true, sir," said Gaspardo, in the same sad and gentle tone; "and I consider it my duty, as her brother, to

take charge of her. She is entirely out of her mind, as I suppose you saw."

"You don't say? Wife said she seemed sort o' light-headed, but I didn't mistrust 'twas anythin' ser'us. How long has she been so?"

"Ever since the birth of her last child. Sometimes she is so wild and furious as to be dangerous."

"Land o' Goshen!" ejaculated Burchard, in tones of pity and astonishment. "An' she looks an' speaks so gentle. Though I minded that her eyes had a kind o' wild glitter in 'em. But won't you come in? She's been asleep, but I think she's waked up now."

"Oh, no. I don't want you to mention my name to her, or let her know that I have been here. It would throw her into such a state of excitement that we could do nothing with her. You know how it is with the insane, they always fear and hate their best friends?"

The wily man studied Burchard's face, as he said this, being very well satisfied with the effect he was producing.

"Ay, to be sure, sir. I remember when Will Taylor was took crazy, he wouldn't let his wife or any of his folks come nigh him, and he was so fond of them afore."

"That is precisely the case with my poor sister; she ran away from home under the impression that I was her worst enemy, and seeking her hurt. I have been greatly distressed in mind, fearing that she had come to some harm. Now the question is, how to get her back again, which must be done without her suspecting my agency in the matter. You spoke about your wife; will you please tell her what I have told you, and bring her down here, I want to talk with her."

Gaspardo maintained his position under the shadow of the tree during Burchard's absence, his cheek flushed and his heart beating fast under the stimulus of the exciting game he was playing.

There was a grave, startled look in Mrs. Burchard's eyes as she looked at him. Her woman's instinct warned her that there was something wrong, though she was unable to perceive in what direction it lay.

Gaspardo saw at a glance that he would have more difficulty with her than her husband, but he trusted in the powers of persuasion at his command, whenever he chose to exert them, and not vainly.

"I must repeat to you, madam, the thanks proffered to your husband for the kindness you have extended to my poor sister, whose mental condition you were clear-sighted enough to perceive at the first."

"I don't want any thanks," said the woman, a little

coldly; "I've only treated the poor thing as I'd like to be treated if I was in her situation."

"Very true; and it does you great credit. Very few are actuated by so kind and Christian a spirit, I am sorry to say."

This bland and genial tone and manner dissipated much of the instinctive distrust that she had conceived of the speaker; still, there were some doubts remaining, and which impelled her to say:

"I thought the poor lady a little flighty, but I judged it to be more from weariness and trouble than anything else."

Gaspardo shook his head with a melancholy air.

"I wish I could think so. But the fact is, the trouble she speaks of exists only in her imagination. Gentle as my sister seems, she is not only incurably, but dangerously mad; so much so as to render it unsafe for her to be at large."

Though evidently impressed by these words, Mrs. Burchard was silent.

Displeased at this, her husband now said:

"Wife, you know you said yourself that you thought she was out of her mind. The gentleman speaks very fair an' honest, an', being her brother, ought to know."

There was a strong family resemblance between Geraldine and her brother, and, though their faces were, in expression, so widely different, it was not so apparent in the expression that Gaspardo's countenance now wore.

This resemblance had a marked effect on Mrs. Burchard.

"I don't doubt what the gentleman says, my dear," she said, apologetically. "But I can't help feelin' sorry for the poor young thing."

"Such sentiments do you honor, my dear madam," responded Gaspardo, blandly. "I feel that I cannot be too thankful that she has fallen into such kind and worthy hands. The greatest service you can do her is to assist me in returning her to her home, where she will be surrounded with all the care and comforts that her unhappy condition demands. Now, the question is, how is this to be done?—it being necessary that there should be none of the excitement and alarm that would act so unfavorably upon her. Did she speak of where she intended to go?"

"Yes, sir; she seems very anxious to get away, an' spoke about taking the boat, though I don't mind that she said what place she was goin' to. She asked me if I couldn't get some team to take her to the landin'."

"That will give us just the opportunity we want. You tell her that you have secured a conveyance, and I will bring or send round a carriage, and so take her away as quietly

and as comfortably as possible. By assisting me in the matter, you will not only earn my gratitude, but a liberal compensation for all your trouble."

Mr. Burchard did not wait for his wife to speak. He placed implicit credence on all that Gaspardo said, and then was not at all averse to take advantage of what is called "the main chance," whenever he could honestly do so.

"Certingly, sir; you may depend on me an' my wife doin' all we can to help you. It's a hard case, an' a hard thing to do; but seein' she's so sot agin you, an' so detarmined to git away, it's the best an' easiest way to fix it. The poor cre'tur ain't fit to travel alone, as a body can see with half an eye."

"Then I may count on the help of both of you?" said Gaspardo, looking a little anxiously at Mrs. Burchard, who had not spoken.

"Sartin, sartin," interposed Burchard, nudging his wife. "Why don't you answer the gentleman, mother?"

"'Cause you haven't given me no chance," retorted the woman, sharply, who evidently viewed with considerable dislike the part she was expected to act.

"I'd rather have nothin' to do with it," she added, turning toward Gaspardo. "Meanin' no offense, sir, it seems so cruel and treacherous. But if she's so crazy as you say she is, it may be a kindness to her in the end; I d'e say 'tis."

With this reluctant consent Gaspardo was obliged to content himself.

"A close carriage will be here at half-past four in the afternoon," he said, with the air of considering everything satisfactorily settled. "Be careful to keep my sister's mind perfectly at rest. If she entertains the slightest suspicion that she is not going to the landing to take the boat, but in another direction, she will be so wild and furious that we can do nothing with her."

Mrs. Burchard returned to the house, but her husband remained by the gate, watching Gaspardo, who was searching his pocket-book, and who, being a shrewd judge of character, was not slow in reading that of the man who was regarding him with such an eager, expectant look.

Selecting one of the glittering coins, he slipped it into Burchard's hand, saying:

"You have already been to considerable trouble in the matter. As soon as it is concluded, and my sister is under my own charge again, as it is for her best good she should be, you shall have two more."

Burchard waited until he heard the clatter of the horse's feet, as Gaspardo rode away. Then stealing a pleased,

admiring look at the gold eagle in his hand, he thrust it into his pocket, and went up to the house.

There was no one in the kitchen but his wife.

"A very nice, pleasant spoken gentleman," he said, casting a furtive glance at his wife's face.

"Mebby he is," she responded, applying herself with increased energy to the clothes she was folding, as though desirous of working off her disturbed feelings; "I don't know anything to the contrary. But there's something 'bout him that I don't like, fur all that."

"Why, mother, how can you be so uncharitable?" said her husband, in a tone of virtuous indignation. "An' you a church-member, too! 'Taint right; an' I'm surprised at ye."

"P'r'aps it ain't; but that's jist the way I feel 'bout it."

"Anybody that had seen 'em would know they was related, an' why shouldn't the rest that he told us be true?" continued Burchard, in the tone of a man trying to convince himself, as well as his audience. "You can't deny but what they look 'nough alike to be brother an' sister."

"They look alike, and then again they don't. There's somethin' deep an' dark 'bout his face that you don't see in her'n."

"Well, wife, however that may be, our duty is plain. It's an onpleasant thing to do, I don't deny that, but we mustn't shirk it on that account. We orter help this gentleman in gettin' his sister back to her home. She'd be obleeged to us for't, if she knew what was for her best good. We hain't had no ser'us difference sence we was married, an' I hope ye ain't goin' agin me now."

"No, father, I ain't. Not but what I'd stand out till doomsday, if I thought I was in the right on't, but I ain't sure. It may be jest as you say, I d'e say 'tis, but it goes 'gainst my heart to deceive the poor lady this way."

CHAPTER XVII.

SNARED AND TAKEN.

GERALDINE, who was in entire ignorance of the storm that was gathering over her head, the new perils that menaced her, began to be restless and uneasy at Mrs. Burchard's prolonged absence, whom she had sent to her husband to inquire about the conveyance she was so anxious to secure.

The thought that her brother was in the neighborhood, searching for her, struck terror to her soul, making her almost wild with anxiety to get away from it.

Unable to endure the weight of her fears any longer, Geraldine found her way out into the kitchen, where her

unexpected appearance, combined with her pale face and gleaming eyes, were quite startling to its two inmates, and which, certainly, did much to corroborate what Gaspardo had told them.

Without heeding the effect she had produced, or thinking of anything but the object she had in view, Geraldine said, hurriedly:

"I am quite well now, and cannot stay here any longer. It is very necessary that I should take the next boat down, but am unable to walk to the landing, which I understand is three or four miles distant. I said that I felt unable to walk so far, but I can and must, if there is no conveyance to be had."

Mrs. Burchard looked at her husband, and then down at the towel in her hands.

Clearing his throat, and speaking with a visible effort, the man said:

"Of course, you can't walk; that's out of the question. Wife told me that you wanted to take the next boat, an' I've jest heard of a man who's goin' that way with a carriage, and who kin take you along jest as well as not."

Geraldine's face brightened.

"Thank you, my good, kind friends--for such you have been to me. I have, unfortunately, lost my purse, and so have but little money about me, but my watch and chain, rings and other ornaments are worth several hundred dollars, and as soon as I can dispose of them, I will see that you are paid for all your trouble."

This grateful look and tone did not serve to put Mr. Burchard any more at ease.

"I don't want no pay," he said, almost gruffly. "What I do is from a sense of duty. My conscience won't let me see you do what you ain't no ways fit fur doin'; an' some day you'll thank me fur't."

"I thank you now," smiled Geraldine, who was too much pleased at the prospect before her to be very critical of her host's obscure and rather peculiar phraseology. "At what time will the carriage be here?"

"At half-past four."

"And that will give us time to reach the dock?"

"Plenty."

Anxious to avoid any further questions, here Burchard left the room, and in compliance with his wife's suggestions, Geraldine made an effort to compose herself to rest, if not to sleep, during the intervening time, so as to gain strength for her journey.

Geraldine's strange words and manner, the excitement and restlessness visible in all her looks and ways, so fully corroborated all that Gaspardo had told her that it was im-

possible for Mrs. Burchard longer to doubt that her mind was seriously affected, but it only increased her tenderness and pity for her unfortunate guest.

"Poor thing!" she thought, as stealing softly into the room she looked upon Geraldine, who was sleeping, with little Isabel in her arms, "she looks as sweet an' innocent as a baby. How sure she is that she's goin' to be taken to the boat, an' how disappointed she'll be when she finds out her mistake. It may be all right, I d'e say 'tis, but I wish, fur massy's sake, that I hadn't no hand in't!"

Promptly, at the appointed time, the carriage made its appearance at the door.

There were two men on the box, one of whom was Gaspardo, though he was so completely disguised that Burchard, who came down to the gate, did not recognize him until he spoke.

"Is everything all right?" said the former, in a low tone.

"Everythin' is all right," was the prompt response. "Wife's helpin' her on with her things; she'll be out in a minute."

"As she may recognize my voice, I shall let you do all the talking. Get her into the carriage as quickly as possible, so that there will be no time for many words."

Slipping the two additional gold pieces into Burchard's hand, Gaspardo resumed his seat upon the box, where Rattle was sitting, muffled up to the eyes, and with a close cap drawn over his forehead.

Geraldine was too eager to be on her way again to linger many minutes; in a very short space of time she made her appearance, Mrs. Burchard accompanying her, with little Isabel in her arms.

The kind-hearted woman's eyes were full of tears.

Geraldine turned toward her as they reached the gate.

"You have been very good to me," she said, sweetly, holding out her hand, "and I should be glad to give you something more than thanks, Pray accept this ring as a token of my gratitude."

This was more than poor Mrs. Burchard could bear.

"No! no! I couldn't think on't," she sobbed, thrusting away her hand. "God forgive me--God bless you, I mean, I hain't done nothin' but what I felt obleeged to, an' I hope you'll think the best on me that you can."

"Wife," whispered Burchard, angrily, twitching her sleeve

Roused and half frightened at this appeal, Mrs. Burchard wiped her eyes, saying to Geraldine:

"Now get into the carriage, dearie, an' I'll hand you the baby."

Here Geraldine, observing the position of the carriage for the first time, said:

"The horses are headed in the wrong direction. From what the boy told me, the village must be down that way. You had better turn the carriage before I get in."

For a moment Burchard was at a loss; but it was only for a moment.

"It's all right, ma'am. You see, the driver's got to go up a piece. Then he's going down by another road that is a shorter way."

Then, addressing the men on the box:

"You must be lively, now This lady doesn't want to miss the boat, an' there's no time to lose."

The bare suggestion of losing the boat was all that Geraldine needed. Stepping into the carriage, she took little Isabel from Mrs. Burchard's arms, the carriage door was slammed to, and the carriage moved away at a rapid pace.

Mr. and Mrs. Burchard remained at the gate watching it until it disappeared from view.

Mr. Burchard's countenance wore a relieved and self-satisfied expression, and which was not unnoticed by his wife, whose feelings were very different.

"I hope you won't never be sorry, Josiah Burchard, fur this day's work," she said, with considerable emphasis; "but I ain't so sure on't as I'd like to be."

"How strange you talk, wife. I've took measures to hev a poor, crazy woman carried back to her home an' friends. I hain't no call to be sorry for't, an' I don't think I ever shall."

Half an hour later Bob made his appearance at the door, his cheeks flushed and his eyes shining with haste and excitement.

"I've called to tell the lady that I've engaged a team to take her to the dock. It'll be here in 'bout twenty minutes. Where is she?"

Mr. Burchard took the pipe from his mouth, with which he was solacing himself.

"She ain't here; she's gone."

"Gone?" echoed the boy in a disappointed tone. "What made her go so airly? The boat don't leave 'fore eight o'clock."

Then, remembering the portemonnaie he had found, he added:

"I'm goin' right down to the dock. I've got to see her 'fore she goes; I've got somethin' to—to say to her."

Burchard was not a little surprised at the agitation manifested by Bob, as well as the interest he took in his late guest.

"Why, what have you got to say to her?"

"Never you mind what, old man," retorted Bob, with a mysterious air. "It's somethin' important."

Now Burchard had his own reasons for preventing any such movement as this.

"You take my advice, lad, an' don't meddle with what don't consarn ye. You'd much better take a good hot supper with us, than streakin' it off down there on a fool's arrant."

"It happens to be somethin' that does consarn me," responded Bob, turning toward the door. "So I'll hev to decline both advice an' supper, though I'm obleeged to ye all the same."

Mrs. Burchard, who was present, had been silent through all this.

Unable longer to restrain her indignation, she now said:

"I declare if it ain't a shame for you to let the boy think she's gone down there."

Then, springing through the doorway, out upon the porch, she cried:

"Bob! Bob!"

But Bob had got too far along on his way to hear her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT BOB FINDS IN THE WOODS.

THE reader will not be surprised to learn that Bob failed to find Geraldine at the dock, to his unconcealed surprise and disappointment.

He lingered around, however, until the boat left, entering into conversation with a number, whose business called them thither, for the purpose of ascertaining if any one answering to Geraldine's description had been seen, but without any satisfactory result.

"There were some other folks here this morning inquiring about a lady they expected to find here," said one of these. "Just such a looking lady, too, I should say, by what they said of her."

Though only fourteen, and with limited opportunities for education, Bob had considerable natural shrewdness and common sense, and this set him to thinking.

"Was it two men on horseback, one on 'em short an' the other tall, with black eyes an' hair, an' sort o' fierce-like?"

"Yes. And I heard the tall one say to the other, 'that they must have missed her on the road, and that he would leave him here and go back.' Then he rode away."

"An' you didn't see nothin' more of 'em?"

"No."

"I did," said another; "I see him come back an' talk a spell to the other one. Then they both went to Manson's stable an' hired a carriage an' drove off."

"Which way?"

"I didn't notice?"

Bob was both puzzled and indignant. That the lady he had befriended had fallen into the hands of these men seemed more than probable, but had it been through the connivance of Burchard? It certainly looked like it.

He was not long in retracing his way back to the house, bursting in upon Burchard and his wife like a small hurricane.

"A pretty trick you've played me! The lady ain't there, an' she hain't been there nuther!"

"I didn't s'pect she was," said the old farmer, dryly; "she went another way."

"An' you knowed it all the time, an' let me go clear down there, jist for nothin'?"

"I'd hev told ye, if ye hadn't been in such a thunderin' hurry. Not that I consider it any of your business."

"I sent that lady to ye, old man," responded Bob, in a towering rage, "an' you may jest bet that I shall make it my business to find out what you've done with her."

"You see, Bob," interposed Mrs. Burchard, with a mild, conciliatory air. "the poor thing is crazy, an' so her brother come an' took her away."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe she is any more crazy than I am.

"What did she do, that made you think she was?" added Bob, turning to Mrs. Burchard, in whom it was easy to see he had the most confidence.

"Well, she seemed wild and flighty-like."

"I guess you'd be wild and flighty too, if you'd been wanderin' 'bout all night with nothin' to eat, and knowed that somebody was huntin' you down as if you was a wild beast."

"So I told her brother. I said it seemed more as if it was trouble, or gettin' so worn out like, that made her act so strange, than anythin' ser'us."

"P'r'aps he wasn't her brother at all. I met him up at the corner jest arter I left her here this mornin', and if ever a man had a bad, cruel face, he had. Did she go with him contented?"

"The poor dear never knowed she was goin' with him at all; she thought she was goin' to the dock. Her brother didn't want us to let on that he had anythin' to do with it. I told Josiah that that was what made me feel the wust. It seemed so deceitful an' treacherous."

"An' so it was. An' I never thought you was the woman

to do it, either. A poor, hunted-down defenseless thing, an' with a baby, too."

The doubts that Mrs. Burchard had all along entertained sent these words home to her heart.

"It was somethin' that I didn't want anythin' to do with, an' so I told 'em. I declare for't I never felt wuss in my life than when I see her gittin' into the carriage, specially when she thanked me so pretty for all my kindness; but her brother talked so fair, an' Josiah thought 'twas all right——"

"An' so I think now," interrupted Burchard, wrathfully. "An' I tell ye what 'tis, young man, I don't want ye to come yere an' talk to me an' my wife this way. We hain't done nothin' we're ashamed on; crazy folks has to be managed. There was my brother's wife's cousin, Jane Pettigrew, nobody could have got her to the 'silum if they hadn't made her believe she was goin' to visit her sister. Things has come to a pretty pass when a lad like you lays down the law to a man of my years!"

Here the speaker pulled out of his pocket his red bandana handkerchief, taking with it one of the gold coins that Gaspardo had given him, and which rolled to Bob's feet.

Picking it up, Bob laid it on the table.

"How many of these did that black-eyed feller give ye fur doin' his dirty work fur him?"

Burchard's face was almost as red as the handkerchief with which he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

He cast a shame-faced look at his wife, whose countenance showed that this was a new and unwelcome revelation.

"I didn't ask no pay," he said, surlily; "and I'd done jest the same if I hadn't got none. He put this in my hand jest as he was goin' off, an' it's nobody's business. An' now, you young sass-box, if you don't make yourself scarce——"

Believing discretion to be the better part of valor, Bob put the door between himself and the speaker's wrathful face.

"If I was only bigger, an' he wasn't an old man, I'd soon let him know what I thought of sech doin's, an' it wouldn't be by words, nuther!" he thought, as he pursued his way home. "I never will believe she was crazy; an' I declare if it ain't a burnin' shame!"

The moon was high in the heavens, making everything as clear as day.

"Here is where I fust saw her." he thought, as he came to the fence by which Geraldine stood when she called to him. "Didn't she look pretty, though! Sech beautiful

black eyes, an' sech a sweet smile an' voice! I never see anybody like her, an' never expect to ag'in."

Here Bob gave a half-sigh.

He was a warm-hearted, imaginative boy, with a good deal of unawakened poetry in his nature; still too young to have any idea of love as a passion, he was of that age and temperament when a beautiful woman becomes the object of wonder and admiration.

Geraldine's beauty and gentle, winning words and ways, combined with her appeal to him for aid and protection, had made her the object of chivalrous affection and devotion, rarely excelled by those of riper years and experience.

The sadness and uncertainty of Geraldine's fate filled him with pity and terror.

"Poor lady," he thought. "I wonder where she is now. There can't nothin' make me believe that she's crazy. That man had a real wicked look, an' I don't believe he means her any good. An' to think of his gettin' hold on her, arter all the pains I took to send him another way."

Here Bob was startled by a plaintive cry.

Pausing, he listened, but hearing nothing further, and supposing it to be the cry of a bird or animal, he walked on.

Presently he heard the same sound again, this time louder and more prolonged.

It seemed to come from a dense piece of woods on the right, and was evidently the cry of a child in great want or distress.

Getting over the fence, he moved quickly in the direction whence the cries proceeded.

He had gone only a few steps, when he saw a bundle of something white in the path beyond.

The sounds that proceeded from it, showed that it was an animated bundle, and on picking it up and unrolling the blanket and cloak that enveloped it, he found that it contained a child of less than a year old.

On further examination, he saw that it was the babe that he had held in his arms in the morning, and whose resemblance to her beautiful mother he remembered so well.

As though she knew that she had found a friend, the little creature's cries ceased as soon as Bob lifted her in his arms, nestling there as though glad to find so pleasant a shelter.

Just then he heard the hurried clatter of horses' feet along the highway he had just quitted.

Suddenly stopping, it was followed by the sound of approaching footsteps.

More from instinct than anything else, Bob crouched

down in a little thicket of tall bushes, that completely screened him from view.

"Here is where I threw the little brat out of the carriage," said a voice that Bob well remembered, though he had heard it but once. "It's killed, no doubt. It never should have had any being—that it had is an eternal disgrace to our name. So I'm glad of that; only if it should be found, it might arouse unpleasant suspicions. Do you see any signs of it, Pietro? Look in that direction."

A cold perspiration started out on Bob's face; if discovered, he knew his life would be the forfeit, as well as the innocent child's, toward whom his heart was drawn so strongly.

Supposing it should cry? His heart stood still at the bare thought.

But as though the little creature knew that its preservation depended upon it, it lay with its head on Bob's shoulder without making a sound or motion.

One of the men had a dark lantern, and in the search they were making its rays were thrown so directly on the place where Bob was secreted, that for a moment he was almost sure that he was seen.

Then, to his great relief, the man that held it passed on; and, apparently satisfied that he had made a thorough search in that direction, did not come that way again.

"Are you sure this was the place?" he hears one of them say.

"Yes; I know I stopped the carriage just by that tree yonder. I flung the child right over the fence. Somebody must have found it; it was too young to walk away."

"It wouldn't have been very likely to have done so, after the fling you gave it, if it hadn't been," said the other. "You had better have kept your temper."

"I suppose I had," was the gloomy response. "But what is a man to do with a woman screaming in the way Geraldine did, and with the expectation of some one coming along and hearing her? I could have strangled her!"

"I dare say. And you had better have done it, too, than fling the child where it would be picked up, and so, perhaps, bring everything out."

"Why, do you think the child has anything on it that could identify it?"

"I can't say as to that. It is rather too young to wear ornaments. But I think, under the circumstances, that it was a very risky thing to do, and may make us trouble. There is no knowing what it may lead to. We had better

do what we have to do quickly, and get out of this part of the country as soon as we can."

Scarcely daring to breathe, Bob listened to the retreating footsteps, and then to the clatter of the horses' feet until they died in the distance.

Then, pale and trembling, he arose from his constrained position, staggering, rather than walking, to a natural seat formed by some stones near by.

Cool as the night was, the terror he had been in had brought the moisture out in large drops upon his forehead.

His first thought was of the child.

Alarmed at its limpness and quietude, Bob looked down upon it.

Its eyes were shut, but it did not look as if it was sleeping, and he noticed, for the first time, that there was a livid mark across the forehead.

Frightened at its death-like appearance, he went to a brook near by, laving its head and face in the cool, clear water.

To his great relief and delight, Isabel opened her eyes, smiling up into his face.

Then she moaned, as if in pain, crying:

"Mamma! mamma!"

His eyes filled with tears.

"Poor, poor baby! I wish your mamma was here. Poor lady! she's wuss off than you be, I'm afraid."

The events of the last few hours, especially the responsibilities thrust so suddenly upon him, had done the work of years in arousing the capabilities of his nature.

"The little thing hain't nobody but me," he thought, as he looked down on it, his heart swelling with a sense of pride and ownership as he saw how sweet and helpless she was; "an' it ain't goin' to want fur nothin' if I can help it. She's left to me to take care of, an' I'm goin' to do it!"

But in spite of the confident tone of these reflections, there was a puzzled feeling at Bob's heart as he queried what he was to do with this helpless charge.

There were no bones broken, the blanket and cloak in which she was wrapped having prevented that; but the bruise on the forehead ought to be attended to, and then she was evidently suffering from cold and hunger.

At first, he thought he would take it back to Mr. Burchard's, but, after some deliberation, he rejected it.

He knew how kind-hearted his wife was, but he had lost all confidence in her husband, judging him more hardly than he deserved to be; for though a man capable of being blinded by his own interest, like many another, he would not do a cruel or unjust thing, if he knew it to be such.

"It will be just like him to let those men know where she is. He'll take their story instead of mine, an' the upshot of it will be that she'll be given up to 'em. I know what I'll do, I'll carry it to Aunt Jane. There ain't a kinder heart anywhere, an' though uncle don't like babies, he'll like this one or I'll lose my guess. They'll keep it for a spell, I know. When they hear its strange, sad story, they'll love an' pity it, jist as I do, poor baby!"

And holding his precious charge carefully in his arms, Bob struck into a narrow path that led to a road that wound along the river.

CHAPTER XIX.

BABY'S NEW HOME AND FRIENDS.

MRS. BROWN was bustling about in her pleasant kitchen getting supper, or rather putting the finishing touches to it.

It was all lying upon the round table, covered with snowy linen, that the old-fashioned grandmother, who sat knitting in the corner, had spun and woven with her own hands.

And a plentiful and tempting repast it was.

A blue-edged platter was in the center, on which were the vegetables and meat left over from dinner. At one end of the table was a loaf of brown bread, at the other a loaf of white, supplemented by a "pat" of golden butter.

Then there were clear white honey, in the comb, a plate of doughnuts and cheese, and a pitcher of cider and of milk.

All making up an array of "creature comforts," very pleasant to look at, and still more agreeable to partake of.

Twice Mrs. Brown went to the door, looking down toward the road.

"I wonder what keeps Robert so late?" she said, as she returned from her second look, addressing her husband, who was sitting by the cheerful blaze. "He ought to have been here more'n an hour ago."

"He's stopped on the road some'eres, I s'pose," was the response. "Boys will be boys. I only wish he was more like other boys than he is."

"That he wan't so fond of his book, I s'pose you mean?" said the wife, a little anxiety visible beneath the smile that was seldom absent from the placid, motherly face.

"Yes, I do," was the rather irritable response. "What good is book-larnin' goin' to do the boy? He's got all that I ever had, an' that's enough. It'll only make him discontented and shiftless."

"I do' know 'bout that, John. Robert ain't like the general run of boys—never seemed to care to j'ine in any of

their fun an' frolics. An' I can't help thinkin', if he had a good chance fur schoolin', that he'd turn out somethin' more'n common."

"That's because you're so wrapped up in the boy. He won't be fit fur nothin'; you jest sp'ile him."

"No, you can't say that he's sp'iled, John, even if I am partial; a sweeter-tempered, more industrious boy never breathed. He was almost beside himself with joy when I told him that you said he could go to school this winter, an' I do hope that there won't be nothin' happen to prevent it."

"I ain't goin' back from my word," said Mr Brown, more in response to his wife's look than words. "I said the lad should go to school this comin' winter if he wanted to, an' so he shall. But I think it's jist foolishness, all the same."

Mrs. Brown's face cleared at this assurance.

"I guess we won't wait supper any longer? you must be hungry arter cutting wood all day. Come, grandma. I can't help thinkin' it's queer about Robert though; he's always been as reg'lar as a clock."

The "supper things" had been put away, except what had been left for Bob, who still tarried.

Mrs. Brown's surprise at this was fast giving place to alarm, when the door opened, and in Bob walked, laying a little animated bundle in her lap.

"I found it in the woods!" he cried excitedly. "It's *my* baby; God gave it to me!"

The good woman gazed in speechless amazement upon the child that was lying on her knees.

It was no time for questions, however; "lawful sakes, did you ever!" being all that escaped her lips as she proceeded to attend to the wants of the forlorn little creature, whose helplessness and beauty appealed so strongly to her heart.

Bob assisted her to the extent of his ability, bringing warm water, bandages and liniment, and, lastly, some cunning little garments that had been lying there at the bottom of Mrs. Brown's chest for many a year.

In the meantime, Mr. Brown sat motionless in his seat on the other side of the fire, staring at the two and the object of their loving ministrations.

Having eaten to repletion of the nice new milk and white bread, which Bob had prepared for her in his own pewter porringer, little Isabel lay contentedly in Mrs. Brown's lap, staring up at the faces that were bending over her.

Mr. Brown now approached.

As though she saw something that pleased her in that rugged but not unkindly face, the little creature cooed, holding out her dimpled hands toward him.

At this, the half frown that the man's face wore changed to a look of pleased interest.

His wife was quick to notice and take advantage of this.

"Ain't she pretty, John?"

Though John made no verbal response, he surrendered his big brown forefinger to the clasp of one of the little fluttering hands, gazing with an involuntary admiration into those black, velvety eyes.

"She's pretty enough, if that's all," he said, a few moments later, as his wife repeated the question, speaking a little gruffly, as though half ashamed of his weakness

"She ain't half so pretty as her mother," burst out Bob. "Oh! auntie, oh! Uncle John, if you could have seen *her!*"

Mr. Brown turned his eyes inquiringly upon the speaker, and his voice had an impatience and even sternness in it, as he said:

"Where *is* the child's mother? And where did you come across either? Come, lad, I want an explanation."

Bob needed no urging to tell his wonderful story; the strange events, in which he had so strangely participated, having made so strong an impression on his mind that he could think of little else.

He commenced, when Geraldine called to him over the fence, in the dawn of the early morning; narrating in his own way, his rude, but expressive language enhancing its interest to his simple-hearted auditors, his futile efforts to aid and defend her; his stormy interview with Burchard; his finding of her babe in the woods, down to the time when those evil men came back to complete their cruel work.

"Bless me!" ejaculated Mrs. Brown, with uplifted hands, at its conclusion, "did ever any one hear the like? If it don't sound just like a story out of a book."

"That proves what I heard Parson Decker say t'other day," responded Bob. "He said there was things goin' on all around us that folks dursent put into print, fur fear nobody wouldn't believe 'em."

Mr. Brown had listened to Bob's story with absorbing interest.

"That reminds me of somethin' I heard neighbor Larkins say, though I didn't take no account on't at the time. He said, as he was walkin' through Allen's woods, 'bout sundown, he saw a carriage come tearin' along the road, an' a woman in it, screamin' like mad."

"It was the poor, pretty lady," said Bob, sorrowfully; "those wicked and cruel men were carryin' her off."

"There's law for sech people," responded Mr. Brown, with a grave shake of the head. "It's somethin' that ought to be looked arter."

"Oh, uncle! if you make any stir 'bout it they'll come an' take away my baby. It won't do a mite of good. You see, they know just how to talk an' make everythin' smooth. An' then they've got lots of money, an' money can do most anythin'."

"Well, I'll see 'bout it in the mornin'. It's time you was to bed now, an' we all was."

CHAPTER XX.

DISCOVERY AND CONFESSION.

THE latter part of Geraldine's journey back to Hunter's Lodge was performed in an enforced quietude, in marked contrast to the excitement that had followed her first suspicion of the treachery that had been practiced against her.

For a few minutes consciousness had given way beneath the horrors of her position and the violence to which she was subjected.

When it returned she found herself gagged and her hands pinioned behind her; her last sensation being the clutch of the fingers of one of her captors around her throat, in his endeavors to stifle her outcries.

Her first thought was of her baby.

She remembered her brother snatching it from her arms, in his first struggle with her, and she remembered no more.

Unable to move, or make the slightest sound, she cast her eyes around the carriage, her heart full of deadly apprehension as she found that it was nowhere to be seen.

Then, as she felt the motion of the revolving wheels, knowing only too well whither they were taking her, her thoughts took a still darker direction.

Had her husband's body been found? was the involuntary query that arose, her heart sinking as she thought how impossible it was that that dark secret could be kept any longer.

A feeling akin to despair seized her, as she saw how vain were all her efforts to escape, that, in spite of all her carefully-laid plans, the hardships she had undergone, she had been brought back to face the unspeakable horrors and perils that this discovery would inevitably bring.

Why should she struggle any longer?

The carriage stopped, and with her eyes unbound, but her arms still pinioned, Geraldine was lifted out.

Her eyes had been so long in darkness, that at first all she could discern was the outlines of a dusky figure upon the steps, made visible by the flash of a lighted candle, that was held high above the head.

Then some thin, wiry fingers clutched her arm, and a voice hissed in her ear:

"Marse Robert is come. Do you want to see him?"

"No—oh, no!" moaned the conscience-stricken wife, sinking down upon her knees.

Lorenzo Gaspardo and his brother Pietro were witnesses to this strange spectacle.

The former now said:

"Is Mr. Bayard here, Prue?"

There was a strange look in Prue's eyes as she rolled them from one to the other.

"Yes, sah. Marse Robert here. Do *you* want to see him?"

"Of course. Take me to where he is directly."

Some idea must have entered the speaker's mind that the person he expected to see would hardly approve of the harsh measures he had taken with his wife, however hard he might be with her himself, for he said, in a low tone, to his brother:

"Unbind her arms."

"*She* got to come, too," said Prue, who still maintained her position and strange demeanor.

"No! no! I cannot, I cannot?" moaned Geraldine, still cowering upon the ground.

"And I say yes, yes," cried Lorenzo, angrily, lifting her on to her feet. "What do you mean by such conduct? Your husband was once fool enough to love you, as few women are loved, and if you don't make your peace with him, at least sufficienly to save our name from disgrace, you'll soon find out what to expect from me. He'll show you a good deal more mercy than I shall."

It was part of the wretched wife's punishment to feel and realize this, as no one else could.

Silent and grim, Prue moved on ahead; the light from the candle flashing about her tall, gaunt form, and giving it a still more spectral appearance.

Impelled by the strong hand that grasped her arm, Geraldine soon found herself in a room, in the middle of which, on a long narrow table, lay a ghastly spectacle, from which, hardened as Lorenzo Gaspardo's nature was, he recoiled with an ejaculation of horror and dismay.

Like some gnarled and leafless tree, tossed by the tempest, Prue flung her long arms aloft, while a cry of mingled grief and rage burst from her lips, more like a wild animal's than anything human.

"There's Marse Robert," she cried, rocking herself backward and forward, "all there's left on him. I found him in the cell, down suller. She, *she* murdered him!"

Lorenzo turned a dark, inquiring look upon Geraldine's face.

Raising her hand, with a still more impressive tone and gesture, Prue continued:

"Here, beside his dead body, I charge her with the crime, an' she can't, she dursen't deny it."

Contrition and remorse swept every other feeling from that crushed and desolate heart. Covering her face with her hands, Geraldine's tears fell fast, as she faltered:

"It is true—alas! alas! that I should live to say it! I killed the man that I know, too late, to have been the best and truest friend I had. I was mad, mad!"

"See!" cried the negress, exultantly, "she owns it. She ain't goin' to escape *me*. I'll have a constable here in the mornin'. She's a murderess, an' shall die the death of one!"

Lorenzo Gaspardo now spoke:

"If she is a murderess, she shall surely die the death of one, but not in the way you propose, Prue. Do you want to drag your master's name, as well as mine, through all the mire and dirt that such a course as that would render inevitable? Leave her to *me;* she will be far less likely to escape the punishment she merits."

The spirit of cruelty and revenge had taken full possession of Prue's heart, and she was evidently unwilling to relinquish the advantage she had gained over the woman she hated. So there was a dubious expression to her countenance and tone as she said:

"How am I to be sure of that, sah?"

"You shall be an eye-witness to it."

"No! no!" implored Geraldine, in accents of horror; "deliver me to the nearest magistrate, Prue, but not to him."

"You see which she would rather you would do," said Gaspardo, significantly.

These words, together with Geraldine's evident reluctance, turned the wavering scales. Disengaging her dress from the hands that clung to it, she said sullenly:

"Take her, then; you said I should see for myself, sah, an' you mustn't forgit it."

"Never fear, Prue; I sha'n't forget."

Though so altered as to be recognizable in no other way, the garments worn and the papers on them made it clearly evident to the Gaspardos that the body found by Prue was that of their unfortunate brother-in-law.

In pursuance of their determination to keep the whole matter in their own hands, they decided to have the remains buried privately, and at night.

With a refinement of cruelty of which few are capable,

Lorenzo Gaspardo obliged Geraldine to follow her husband to his nameless and untimely grave.

So the following night, a little after twelve, a carriage containing three persons moved slowly down the back avenue, and which led to a wild, dreary, unfrequented piece of woods, which lay between two high hills.

The carriage was preceded by a covered wagon, and which stopped by an open grave.

Chilled to the marrow by the dampness of the chill December night, Geraldine sat listening to the rattling of the earth upon the rough coffin; a vague feeling of wonder at her heart as to how soon it would fall upon her own.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TRIAL AND SENTENCE.

In Eagle Nest, the home of the two brothers, Lorenzo and Pietro Gaspardo, and which was situated on a high, lonely, almost inaccessible spot on the river, sat two men in solemn conclave.

They wore black masks; the walls of the room being hung and the table in the center of it covered with cloth of the same somber hue.

There was no other furniture, with the exception of three chairs—one of these being empty, and placed at the further end of the table, those occupied by the masked men being at the other end.

For full five minutes not a word was spoken, the faces of the two being turned in mutual expectancy toward the door, which now opened to admit a man, also masked, who led, or rather supported, a woman to the vacant chair, whose trembling limbs seemed inadequate to bear the weight of the heavy manacles that bound the slender wrists, and whose pale face was rendered still more pallid by the wealth of jetty hair which fell in disordered masses around her.

Removing the manacles, the man took his stand by the door, standing there silent and motionless.

As though they were desirous of striking terror to the soul of their helpless prisoner, the two men surveyed her for some moments in silence.

Then the taller of them stretched out his arm, saying:

"Lost and guilty woman! all is discovered. That dark deed, which you thought to be hidden from every human eye, has come to the light. Are you prepared to acknowledge your guilt and accept the conquences of it?"

Geraldine's voice, though low, was clear and resolute as she said:

"I am willing to acknowledge all that I am guilty of. I

own—ah! woe is me!—that, in a frenzy of terror and despair, I struck the fatal blow that deprived my husband of life. But the other charge brought against me is false. I have been blind, foolish, weak; but, as God is my judge, I am guiltless of doing him any other wrong."

"Peace, woman!" was the stern reply; "you do but add to your guilt by denying it. Will you disown your own handwriting—the confession signed by your own hand?"

"It was extorted from me. If this were my last hour on earth, I should still protest my innocence."

"Unfortunately for your protestation to be of any avail," was the cool response, "there are too many things to corroborate it. I believe that confession to be true. And setting that aside, I know from your own lips that you are a murderess!"

That pale face flushed, while the dark eyes glowed with something of their wonted fires.

"And *you* are a murderer!"

And without heeding, if she noticed, the consternation that these words occasioned, Geraldine continued speaking in tones of horror and anguish, which gave them added intensity and meaning:

"You killed my innocent baby, who never harmed you or any one. You threw it out of the carriage, leaving it for dead upon the road. I heard you own and exult over it, when you thought me too insensible, from your brutality, to hear you. You are taking high-handed measures with me for an act into which I was goaded by madness and despair. What punishment do you think that the law would mete out to *your* crime?"

If there had been any disposition to spare the speaker, any touch of mercy or compassion in the hearts of her self-constituted judges, they were destroyed by these words.

Going to the window, the two brothers conversed together in low and earnest tones.

Pietro, the younger brother, was in favor of imprisonment or exile, his nature being less hardened, but Lorenzo would not hear to this.

"Such a course would be attended with innumerable dangers," he urged. "She got away from us once, and may again. You heard what she said? She has been a trouble and disgrace to us all her life, and the only way is to silence her tongue, at once and forever."

Geraldine awaited in silence the result of the ominous conference upon which her life hung; separated from her boy, her baby snatched from her by so cruel a fate, a feeling of despair had begun to take possession of her.

The brothers resumed their seats. The elder was the first to speak.

"The sentence that we pronounce upon you, and which any judge would pronounce after hearing the evidence, is —*death!*"

A sudden shiver of horror roused Geraldine to a brief struggle against this merciless fate.

"I deny your right to pronounce it. Deliver me over to the law. Denying and extenuating nothing, I will submit to any penalty it may inflict."

"And have our name eternally disgraced?" was the fierce response. "All your shameful conduct published in every paper throughout the land? Never!

"It is useless for you to make any appeal for mercy," continued Lorenzo, speaking in a less excited, but more impressive tone and manner; "your doom is fixed. A week's time will be given you for preparation, and then your sentence will be executed. But you may, if you will, choose the manner of your death."

"I know you too well to expect any mercy from you. All the favor I ask of you is to let me see a minister of our most holy faith. How else am I to make the preparation you speak of? As you hope for Heaven's mercy, when you need its mercy most, I implore you not to have the blood of my soul on your hands!"

The two brothers were rigid Catholics, placing implicit reliance upon the rites of the Church, and this appeal evidently made a strong impression upon them.

Retiring to the window again, they conferred together for some minutes.

Then returning to the table, Lorenzo said:

"If any way can be devised by which this favor can be accorded you, safely, it shall be granted."

"Safely?" echoed Geraldine, in a tone of surprise. "You surely must know that anything revealed under the seal of the confessional will be safe?"

Lorenzo took an ebony cross from his bosom.

"Will you swear that you will reveal nothing, except under that seal? That you will mention no name or place that will tend to lead to suspicion or detection?"

Geraldine held the cross to her lips.

"I swear it!" was the low and solemn response.

"Then you may have a good degree of confidence that your request will be granted. At all events, we will use our best endeavors to that end. Now what death do you choose to die?"

Though torn from all that made life pleasant or desirable, and her heart so wrung with anguish that the grave at times seemed a welcome refuge, it was not in human

nature to repress the involuntary shudder called forth by these words.

Twice did the wretched woman essay to speak, and twice did the words die in an inarticulate moan upon her lips.

Then she said:

"I have no wish to express on the subject, except that it be as quick and painless as possible."

Lorenzo nodded, and then turning to the man at the door, said:

"Remove the prisoner."

As soon as the brothers were alone, Pietro flung his mask upon the table with a gesture of impatience.

"Why is all this mummery necessary? Do you suppose that it prevents her from recognizing us?"

"I know that it will prevent her from swearing as to our identities," said the other, "which will be a strong point in our favor, should our plans miscarry or any untoward event occur to bring matters to the light. She has not seen our faces since she was brought here, nor do I mean that she shall. As to the rest, in the forms we have gone through with we are not committing murder. I meant that she should have as fair a trial as she would have before any court, and she has had."

"Have it your own way," was the response. "If I had mine, I should have made quicker work of it."

"You wouldn't have had any work at all; you'd have let the whole thing drop through."

"No, I wouldn't. My idea was to give her a thorough scare, make her think that her life was on the point of being taken, and then let her off. And I think it will be the best way now. With her confession and letters in our possession, together with all the proofs we have, we should be able to preserve such a hold on her that she would be only too glad to keep quiet."

"Keep quiet? Not she," retorted Lorenzo, enforcing his assertion with more emphatic language than we care to repeat. "It isn't in her to be quiet anywhere. Didn't you hear what she said about the child? The very first thing she'll do will be to make a stir about that; and you know as well as I what that will lead to. And then there is Prue."

"What has Prue to do with it?"

"A good deal—or she thinks she has, which amounts to the same thing. She loved her master almost as much as she hates Geraldine, and if we let her off she'll be just raving. Nothing will keep her from publicly denouncing Geraldine and getting her punished by due process of law, which is the very thing we want to avoid. No, the only way by which we can insure safety to ourselves is by the

way I propose. Setting everything else aside, her crimes merit death, and die she must.

"And that reminds me," added the speaker, rising to his feet, "that Prue had better be brought here; it will be safer and better every way. She knows too much. There is no knowing what she will take into her head to do, and I want her where she will be under my own eye."

"But supposing she refuses to be brought?"

"She won't do that. I shall tell her that I want her to keep guard over Geraldine and to see that her sentence is carried into execution, and she won't want anything better. We couldn't have a more faithful and vigilant jailer for our prisoner than old Prue."

Prue fully justified Gaspardo's expectations, entering upon her new duties with a zeal and alacrity that were clearly visible in her countenance as she entered the room where Geraldine was confined.

It was hard telling what Geraldine's feelings were as she looked upon that dark, familiar face, and whose look of exultation at her misery it was not easy to mistake.

Weary of contending, hopeless of any escape from the doom that had been pronounced upon her, a feeling of apathy began to creep over her, occasionally broken by the penitence that swept across her as she thought of her crime and how near she was to her final account.

One good thing resulted from Prue's presence; the manacles upon her wrists were removed, the sleepless vigilance with which she was now watched rendered them unnecessary.

Two nights later, Lorenzo Gaspardo was closeted with a man, whose closely-shaven face and garb betrayed his sacred calling.

"It seems right that I should tell you something of my sister's state of mind," said the former, in the soft, gentle tone that he could so well assume. "She has been in delicate health for some time, and like a good many invalids fancies that she is much worse than she is—in fact, that she is about to die. I presume you have met with similar cases before, father?"

The good priest's patience had been too often taxed in this respect for him not to yield a ready assent to this.

Satisfied with the impression he was making, Gaspardo continued:

"Though there are no indications that her life may not be indefinitely prolonged, certainly none of immediate dissolution, as she has expressed a strong desire to see you, I have not thought it best, in her nervous condition of mind, to thwart her."

"Surely not," said the priest. "You have acted wisely

as well as kindly in the matter. The relief and consolations of the confessional are often of incalculable benefit to such. It is the holy mission of the Church to give peace to the troubled mind—to remove even the fancied sorrows of her children."

The speaker was evidently an enthusiast in his calling, his mild blue eyes lighting up with zeal and earnestness as he spoke.

"I am glad to know that you feel in this way, father. I was somewhat fearful that you would consider me presumptuous in soliciting your holy offices, when there seemed to be no apparent need for them. There is another thing that I think it right to mention. My poor sister has certain hallucinations, such as considering that she has committed some great crime, and so on. Of course, you will pay no attention to this."

Rising, the speaker approached the sideboard, on which was a decanter of wine.

Placing it on a table beside the glowing fire, he filled a glass with its ruby contents to the brim, saying:

"You must be chilled and tired with your long, cold ride, father, and in need of some refreshment. In the meantime, I will see if my sister is ready to receive you."

Slowly sipping the wine, that was so grateful to his chilled and wearied frame, and with his eyes fixed on the cheerful blaze before him, the good priest gave himself up to the comforts of his position; his thoughts very naturally reverting to his kind and genial host.

"What a truly Christian gentleman!" he mused. "And so kind and considerate to his unfortunate sister. Rich and generous, too, I should say," glancing around—"I wonder if he wouldn't give something toward the building of our new church?"

While the priest was pleasing himself by the thoughts of furthering what was ever uppermost in his mind, Lorenzo Gaspardo took his way to Geraldine's room, who was reclining upon a low couch, which she seldom left now.

She manifested neither surprise nor terror at his unexpected entrance, all this was passed now.

After glancing around to see that everything was as it should be, that there was nothing to be seen that could give the slightest intimation of the true facts of the case, Gaspardo said:

"In order that you may not make such a shipwreck of the life upon which you will soon enter as you have made of this, I have succeeded in finding, at the expense of no little risk and effort, a priest to absolve your guilty soul. I warn you to confine yourself strictly to your own acts. No intimation of it to this man will save you from the sen-

tence that has been pronounced against you, though it can and will cause his life to pay the forfeit, thus bringing the guilt of two murders upon your soul!"

Geraldine lifted her eyes to that hard and cruel face.

"Have you no sins to be repented of, that you judge me so hardly for mine? I have taken a solemn oath to reveal nothing, and have no wish, even if I dared, to break it. Life is a burthen, too intolerable to be borne, and I look forward with joy to the time when I shall leave it, and go to my husband and child."

A faint sneer curled Gaspardo's lip.

"You seem to love your husband better dead, than you ever loved him living. Do you think that *he* will care to meet *you*, his murderess?"

"I cannot tell. I only know that I understand his worth and prize his love as I never did before. I shall tell him all, and in the clearer light that is now his, I cannot but believe that he will pity and forgive."

Despite the satisfactory explanation that had been given him, there was a strange feeling at the priest's heart as he followed his guide into the room where his penitent lay.

Gaspardo immediately retreated to the door.

The priest's face being turned from him, raising his hand with a warning gesture, that Geraldine well understood, he disappeared through it, leaving the two alone.

CHAPTER XXII.

A JUDGMENT.

THE good priest gazed with an air of benign compassion upon the face, whose dark, mournful eyes were turned with singular intentness upon him.

The story he had heard, together with her youth and beauty, the nameless air of grace and refinement that pervaded every look and motion, gave an added gentleness to his tone, as he said:

"Daughter, I have been given to understand that there is some weight upon your conscience, for which you desire to obtain pardon and peace. Speak freely, as you would to our common Father, whose minister I am, knowing that all you say will be as safe with me as with Him."

"Were I not assured of this, father," responded Geraldine, in a soft, clear voice, in which there was no apparent haste or agitation, "I should not dare to reveal to human ears a crime so dark as mine. Before proceeding further I will say that I wish to direct your attention to my sins only, and to make no allusion to any that may have been committed against me."

"Surely, my child, that is the proper spirit with which

to approach the confessional. Our own sins, and not the sins of other people, are what we have to do with at a time like this. I trust, however, that you forgive all who have wronged you. Unless we forgive, we cannot be forgiven."

Geraldine laid her hand upon the sorely-wounded heart, which throbbed anew at this allusion.

"I have tried, father," was the meek response. "But it is hard, hard."

I think it would have touched Lorenzo Gaspardo's heart —if he had any heart to touch—to have seen how carefully Geraldine refrained from casting blame upon any one but herself in the dark and sorrowful confession that fell from her trembling lips.

She mentioned no names, making no allusion to either of her brothers; and though she hesitated occasionally in her choice of a word, as if fearful of saying too much, her words and manner were so collected and at variance with anything like fancifulness or incoherence, and which he was led to expect from her brother's story, that the good father was not a little puzzled as she went on.

Geraldine, on her part, was at a loss to understand the entire lack of astonishment and horror at so dark a revelation, as well as the alacrity with which he pronounced the absolution, that fell like a benison upon her perturbed spirit.

Perhaps some faint suspicion of the cause entered her mind, for she said:

"I think that I must have been mad when I did this, but I am quite sane now."

"He who reads the heart notes and weighs every extenuating circumstance," said the priest, soothingly. "Now that you have obtained forgiveness, do not let your thoughts rest upon it any more. You are young, and have, I trust, many pleasant years before you."

Geraldine looked with mournful intentness into those kindly eyes.

"The young die as well as the old, father. The hours appointed to me on earth are very few, else I had not been so anxious to unburden to you the sin that weighed so heavily upon my soul. Now that I have obtained, as I humbly trust, pardon and peace, I am not only willing but glad to go."

"You found my sister in a rather peculiar state of mind?" said Gaspardo a few minutes later, looking keenly into the priest's thoughtful face.

"She certainly seems to be laboring under some strong and strange hallucinations. It is almost pitiful to hear one so young and fair talking of death with such a calm certainty of its being so near."

"It is only her morbid condition of mind," responded Gaspardo, with a shrug of the shoulder. "Not that it is any less real to her on that account. I am very glad you have seen her, as I think it will be of benefit to her in more ways than one. It is my intention to take her to a warmer climate soon; this place doesn't seem to agree with her. As a slight return for your trouble, allow me to contribute a trifle to some one of the benevolent objects in which you are interested."

The priest did not glance at the bill that the speaker slipped into his hand until he was on his way home, his heart being gladdened as he noted the amount.

"He called it a trifle," he thought, as he returned it to his pocket, "and it may be so to him, but it is quite an important item to me."

Then his thoughts returned to his young and interesting penitent.

He was fain to confess, with the sole exception of the assertion of her nearness to death, that there was nothing in her words or manner to indicate a disordered mind.

Was the story she told him the product of a diseased imagination, or was there some basis in fact for it?

But even if the latter proposition were true, and her brother had taken this method to shield her from the consequences, what had he, in the sacred character of a confessor, to do with that?

With this thought he dismissed it from his mind.

As Geraldine listened to the priest's retreating footsteps, a feeling of peace and tranquillity settled upon her soul to which she had long been a stranger.

With the heavy weight that had been lifted from her heart, all desire for life, all fear of death, had vanished.

Even Prue noticed the change in her, noting it with a feeling of sullen disappointment at her heart, having counted with fiendish satisfaction on the dismay and terror that her helpless prisoner would experience as her doom drew near.

That same night, a couple of hours after midnight, old Prue was summoned into Gaspardo's presence, who had been walking restlessly about the room ever since the priest left.

"Well, how is she now?"

"She's sleepin' sah, as soun' and peaceful as a chil'," was the discontented response. "It's mighty cur'us, when she don' know that she be 'live in de mornin'."

"Sleeping, is she?" said Gaspardo, entirely ignoring Prue's evident dissatisfaction; "that is well."

Taking another turn up and down the room, Gaspardo paused again where the old negress stood.

"I don't mean that she shall be alive in the morning, Prue," he said, in a significant tone. "What I have to do must be done before the dawning of another day. Did I understand you to say that you wanted to help me?"

"Yes, yes," cried the woman, with glittering eyes. "She killed Marse Robert, an' I want to help. An' is she goin' to die to-night? Oh, good, good! Let me go an' tell her."

"No, no," responded Gaspardo, impatiently; "that would spoil all. I am going to manage this thing. You must put yourself under my guidance, obeying my instructions implicitly. Do you understand what I say?"

"Yes, sah."

"Then come with me, and I will show you, better than any words can, how I intend to carry out my purpose."

Taking a lantern from the table, he passed out of the room into a long, narrow entry, which led to a side entrance, going down a short flight of steps, and from thence into the open air.

He moved cautiously along until he came to a sort of rocky promontory that projected over the river, whose murmurous flow could be heard nearly a hundred feet below.

Prue followed close behind, reaching the spot almost as soon as he did.

"Do you think any one would be likely to survive after being thrown over here, Prue?" said Gaspardo, turning toward her.

"No, sah; not if dey went to the bottom of the river."

"I shall take good care of that," replied Gaspardo, pointing to a little pile of stones, together with a quantity of rope and cord. "I have studied the matter over a good deal, and have come to the conclusion that this is the surest and safest way. In this disposition of her no trace will be left behind that will tend to arouse suspicion."

The light from the lantern fell full upon Prue's face, revealing clearly its expression of sullen dissatisfaction, and which arrested Gaspardo's attention.

He studied the face for a moment and then said:

"What is the matter? Don't this plan suit you?"

"No, sah, it don't."

"Perhaps you will have the goodness to state what would suit?" inquired Gaspardo, in a tone of ironical politeness that only thinly veiled his impatience, and something of distrust, which had begun to creep into his heart.

"You need not answer me here," added Gaspardo, as Prue was about to speak. "Come back to the house, and then we will have this thing out."

Having regained the room, whose cheerfulness and

warmth contrasted pleasantly with the dreary aspect outside—

"Now, then," he said, confronting Prue, who had followed him, "let us know what *would* satisfy you? Not that I mean to say that it will alter my plans any; I don't think it will, but I am curious to hear."

"There's only one thing that would r'ely satisfy me," replied Prue; "to hev her hung—hung as high as Haman, an' all the people hootin' an' p'intin' their fingers at her!"

"I thought I had explained all that to you," interposed Gaspardo, with visible impatience.

"You say that this covers Marse Robert's name an' your name with shame, an' so I guv that up. All I ask is that when her las' hour come—you say it come now—that she be given over to me—*me!*"

It almost seemed as if Prue's grief at the loss of her master and hatred of Geraldine had turned her brain; there being something akin to madness in the fierce vehemence with which these words were spoken.

Gaspardo, who was something of a philosopher in his way, looked curiously at those gleaming eyeballs and outstretched arm, whose fingers clutched the empty air as though it was the throat of some invisible foe.

"Supposing I should consent to this, what would you do with her?"

"She'd die," was the grim response; "an' that's all *you* want."

"Oh, no, Prue! it's the main thing, perhaps, but it isn't the whole by any manner of means. I don't think you quite understand me, Prue, so I will explain. If I have no love for my sister, and I make no pretext of having any, I don't feel toward her as you seem to do. By her own confession, she has committed a crime against the law that would render her life a forfeit to it, and to save the family name from dishonor I simply take the law in my own hands. That is all."

"That be all, hey?"

That significant look and tone made Gaspardo change color.

He turned his face quickly toward the speaker.

"What else should there be?"

"I do not know. I heard ye speak to *her* one night 'bout somethin' else."

Gaspardo remembered the time when his anger got the better of his prudence, biting his lips with vexation as it came to his mind.

But it was only for a moment.

"You are right; there are other reasons. But what does

that prove? Nothing more than that she is in my way, and is to be got out of the way just as easily as it can be done, and have it done effectually. She isn't going to be given over to your tender mercies, you may make sure of that. Now the question is, whether you are going to help me or not? Situated as you are, there is no other course for you to take."

There was a peculiar look in Gaspardo's eye as he uttered the last sentence, and which produced a marked change in Prue.

For the first time the thought struck her that it was hardly prudent, in such a lonely, out-of-the-way place, to arouse the fears or resentment of a man who had so little scruple in removing any one who stood in his way.

"Of course, I's willing to help, sah," she said, humbly. "I didn't mean nothin' by what I said, 'cept that I wanted to be sure on't."

Gaspardo was quick to see and follow up his advantage.

"I hope you didn't, Prue; because that is a game that two can play at, and in which you would be very likely to get worsted. You are already seriously implicated in this affair, and it is my intention that you shall take an equal share in its completion—though, of course, under my direction. Do you understand me?"

"I understand that I's to help, sah, and do prezactly as you tell me."

During this conversation, Gaspardo had removed his boots, substituting in their place a pair of felt slippers.

Now taking a bottle and sponge from the table, he opened the door, and, pointing in the direction which led to Geraldine's room, said:

"Then take the lantern and go before me. No noise, mind!"

Pausing by the door, Gaspardo whispered:

"Go in and see if she is still sleeping. Take special note if she wears any garment or ornament with her name or any mark on it."

The harsh grating of the key as it turned in the lock roused Geraldine.

Opening her eyes, she fixed them—with a look that had not the slightest touch of fear or resentment—upon the dark and evil face that bent over her.

"Is that you, Prue? I have had such a sweet, restful sleep."

Old Prue scowled.

"I wonder that yer conscience will let ye sleep."

"I wonder, too," was the meek response. "But since I have seen the good priest, the heavy weight has been lifted from my heart. I had such a beautiful dream. I thought

I saw my husband and child; that my husband put my baby in my arms, and then, putting his own arms around us both, kissed me."

The old woman's scowl was darker than before; had it not been for the sharp ears that she knew were listening outside, the rage that filled her soul at these words would have found audible expression.

"Ye had better sleep while ye can," she muttered, retreating toward the door.

Making a slight change in her position, Geraldine closed her eyes, sinking into another slumber quite as peaceful and profound.

As soon as Prue was convinced of this, she went to the door, and, placing her finger on her lip, beckoned to Gaspardo, who was leaning against the wall outside.

Entering with noiseless step, he stood beside the couch where Geraldine lay, a peaceful look brooding over her face, such as a child might wear.

But if Gaspardo noted this, it brought no tender and subduing recollections to soften his hard heart.

He looked at her intently for a few moments, as if to make sure that her slumber was as profound as it seemed, and then saturating the sponge with the contents of the bottle, which gave forth a peculiar penetrating odor, held it within a few inches of the mouth and nostrils.

Carefully watching the effect, which was very soon visible in the deep lethargy that seemed to steep the senses, he gradually brought the sponge nearer and nearer to the slightly-opened lips until it almost touched them, and through which the breath came slower, and slower, and finally seemed to cease altogether.

Startled by the sudden pallor that overspread the face, Gaspardo dropped the sponge, placing his fingers on the wrist, but found no pulse there.

"Prue, Prue!" he shouted.

Approaching the couch, Prue lifted up the head, which rolled limp and helpless over her arm, and then laid it back upon the pillow.

"What does it mean?" inquired Gaspardo, as she turned toward him.

"It means that she has not only cheated the gallows, but *you!*" replied the woman, with a short laugh.

"Dead?" said the other.

"Dead!" repeated Prue.

"Did you mean to do it?" she added, glancing at the bottle and sponge.

"No; not in this way. It was my intention to produce unconsciousness, and so save trouble on both sides. But it doesn't matter; it amounts to the same thing in the end.

"Can you find your way to the place I showed you?"

Prue nodded.

"Then take the lantern, and go before me."

The woman obeyed, and taking up, not only the body, but the light, narrow mattress on which it lay, Gaspardo followed her.

Being very strong and muscular, he did not pause once in his swift and stealthy stride, though he was evidently glad to lay down his burden as he reached the high point upon the river, and which he had selected for the completion and covering up of his dark work.

After pausing a few moments for breath, he proceeded to bind the body of his victim to the mattress by means of the cords he had provided.

Having done this, with the assistance of Prue, he fashioned one of the sheets into a bag, by knotting the corners of it, so securing it to the mattress that, when filled with stones, it would turn over in its descent, bringing the body downward upon its face.

Having made sure of this, he turned to Prue, who was silently watching him.

"Before we fill the bag we had better get the mattress nearer to the bank."

Suiting the action to the word, Gaspardo passed around to the head of it, and stepping cautiously backward, drew it along.

A moment later the place upon which he stood, to the extent of four feet or more, suddenly gave way, precipitating him down into the dark vortex below.

Uttering a cry of terror, Prue sprung back, thereby narrowly escaping the same fate.

Throwing herself down upon her face, she listened shudderingly to the rattle of the stones and earth as they struck against the shelving cliffs in their descent.

Lifting her head, she looked around.

"They're both gone," she muttered, rising to her feet; "an' I's mighty glad on it, too. If this yer ain't a judgment I do' know what is."

And then, as if she feared some judgment might overtake her, Prue ran down the rocky, precipitous path to the house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BOB'S DREAM.

It was ten minutes past nine, and all was quiet under the humble roof of the Browns.

Little Isabel had been over a week in the tender, motherly care of Mrs. Brown, and having entirely recovered from the

rough treatment to which she had been subjected, and from whose naturally-to-be-expected result she had been so providentially delivered, was beginning to blossom into all the infantine graces which made her so sweet and attractive to at least two of her new-found friends.

It was hard to tell what Mr. Brown thought of this new accession to his household.

He was not a man of many words, but if actions go for anything he viewed with great dissatisfaction the increased expense it would bring, and this feeling was not, perhaps, to be wondered at when one looked at his gray head, and thought of the hard toil by which he had been able to make such scant provision for his old age.

In the meantime he kept away from the child as much as possible, as if he feared that her beauty and winning ways would obtain too strong an influence over his heart.

Mrs. Brown, like the wise and prudent wife that she was, said nothing, trusting that time, and the presence of the babe, that was becoming every day more precious to her, would do better for her than any words could.

They were early sleepers at Mr. Brown's, and on the night alluded to the mistress of the house was the only one that was in the cozy, old-fashioned kitchen, all the rest having retired.

She was busy setting some yeast to rise for to-morrow's baking, when she caught a glimpse of Robert, who had stolen softly down the stairs.

"Why, Robert, I thought you were fast asleep by this time," she said, in a tone of mild reproof.

"I wanted to speak to you a moment, a'ntie, an' jist look at baby. Don't she look sweet?" added the boy, going to the cradle, which he had brought down from the garret for the benefit of his baby guest, and in which he had lain during his own babyhood.

Having admired the pretty picture presented by the sleeping child to his heart's content, Bob, as he was generally called by every one but his aunt, approached the table where she stood.

"Aunt Jane, you know the pocket-book I found and gave you the mornin' after I brought baby here? Did you tell *him* anythin' 'bout it?"

Here the speaker pointed to the bedroom, through whose half-open door could be heard heavy breathing, from some one in a deep slumber.

Mrs. Brown shook her head, while a somewhat troubled, disconcerted look disturbed her usually placid face.

"No, not yet. There ain't no hurry 'bout it."

"'Cause if I can't find the poor lady that lost it it belongs to *her*," said the boy, pointing to the cradle.

"That's jest what I've been thinkin', lad. 'Taint no sech wonderful sum—'bout a hundred dollars—an' the little thing may need it. So I thought that I'd put it away for her, an' not say nothin' 'bout it, at present, to nobody."

"Oh! thank you, a'ntie!" cried the boy, throwing his arms around the neck of the speaker. "I knew you'd think an' do jest the best way. I think you're jest the best an' *rightest* woman in the world! you see baby'll want little dresses an' things, an' you'll know jest what she needs, an' get 'em."

Mrs. Brown kissed the boy, her dead sister's son, and whom she loved as well as if he had been her own.

She could never bear the slightest reflection against "John," though it might he in praise of herself.

"Your uncle means to do what's right, too; there ain't a better man nowheres. Only he don't see things always jest as I'd like to have him. You see, he has to work so hard, an' ain't so young as he was; an' it looks sort o' discouragin' to have another mouth to feed. Mebby I'll have to use the money for somethin' besides dresses, an' sech, but the little mite that the child eats, jest now, ain't goin' to kill nobody."

The next evening Bob was having the little frolic with Isabel that the two always had after supper, and in which the child was unusually gleesome and winning, at least it seemed so to the warm-hearted boy, who was becoming so strongly attached to her.

Mrs. Brown was clearing away the supper things, and her husband sitting by the fire not far from where Bob sat with Isabel on his knee.

Perceiving that his uncle was looking at her, which he seldom did, when anybody was by, the boy ventured to say:

"Ain't she pretty and cunnin', uncle?"

"Pretty is that pretty does," was the sententious and not very sympathetic reply.

"Ay, but she *does* pretty," persisted Bob; "it's her sweet, cunnin' ways that I like most. You mean to keep her, don't you, uncle?"

The old man shook his head.

"It's ruther resky, lad, fur a man of my years to take any more responsibilities than he's got already."

"But you wouldn't—you couldn't turn her out of doors?" faltered Bob, his arms tightening around the child as he spoke.

"That don't foller; there's a place an' means pervided fur all sech."

"You mean the poor-house? Oh, uncle, I can't bear the thoughts of her goin' there—an' she sech a little mite of a

thing, too! I remember goin' there to see old Daddy Colby, an' everythin' was so mixed up an' disagreeable. It ain't a nice place at all!"

"It's plenty good 'nough!" retorted Mr. Brown, sharply. "Them that hain't no home nor means mustn't be so pertic'ler."

"But I'm gittin' to be sech a big boy now, that I can git half a man's wages, an' I'll give all I earn to you."

The old man looked keenly into those earnest, eager eyes.

"Ay; but I thought you were going to school this winter, lad?"

"Uncle, if you'll keep baby, I'll give up going to school."

"If you'll agree to that, I'll keep her, at least, fur a spell. Not that I'd make a pint on't, if I didn't think your goin' to school any more wasn't sheer foolishness."

"I had sech a strange dream last night 'bout her poor mother," said Bob, turning to his aunt, whose face showed her silent sympathy and interest. "I thought she stood holdin' Isabel jist as she did when I fust saw her, only it was by a river. She put the child in my arms, jist as she did then, sayin', 'Take good care of my baby, Bob.' Then a big wave came an' took her away. I sometimes think that I shall see her again, somewheres. Anyway, I mean to do jist as she said."

"All I've got to say," said Mr. Brown, rising from his chair, "is that if you'll stick to your agreement, I'll stick to mine. But I think you'd better sleep on't; you may change your mind in the mornin'. You'd better be off to bed now. I'm a-goin to take the boat airly in the mornin', an' row up the river a piece, an' shall want you to go with me. I promised to take Dr. Graham some butter and eggs, an' we can bring back some shingles to fix the barn with."

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT BOB FOUND IN THE RIVER.

Mrs. Brown was generally the last one up, being one of those women mentioned in Proverbs, who "see well to the ways of her household."

Though she had not thought it prudent to express it by words, she had sympathized strongly with her nephew in having to relinquish what he had been counting upon for so many months, knowing well the effort it cost him.

She had had the care of him ever since he was a baby, laid in her arms by his dying mother, commended by her last breath to her love and care.

Had he not been the affectionate, conscientious boy that

he was, her heart must have gone out toward him with more than common sympathy and tenderness; as it was, no son was ever loved better, or deserved it more.

She did not share her husband's ideas in regard to what he called "book larnin';" it being one of her deeply-cherished convictions that Bob had possibilities in him that would, if allowed to develop, place him far above the position in which he was born.

So, for the first time, there was something like dissatisfaction at her heart as she looked at the little interloper, who was now soundly sleeping, as she thought to what her advent might lead.

As soon as she was sure that her husband was sleeping, she went up to Bob's room, ostensibly to see if he was warm, but really to say some comforting words to him.

Bob generally fell asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow, but he was wide awake now, and Mrs. Brown felt that his cheek was moist as she touched her lips to it.

"I shall be sorry that baby came, if it's going to make my boy unhappy."

"Oh, it ain't that, auntie; I'm ever so much happier since it came. The house seems another sort of place now, an' I'm sure that you love the dear little thing, and would hate to part with her. I'd do twice as much to keep her from goin' to the poor-house; but I'm dreadfully disappointed about not goin' to school. Don't you think uncle a little hard?"

"He don't mean to be, Robert; yer uncle has a real kind heart, if you only come down to it. You see it's ruther hard fur him, too."

"Why, settin' aside baby, there ain't only three on us; an' there's the fruit we sell, an' all the milk, butter an' eggs. I don't see how we can be so dreadful poor."

"We wouldn't be if twan't for the mortgage. It takes all we can rake an' scrape to pay the int'rest on't. If we should fail to do this we'd be pretty sure of bein' turned out of house an' home before a great while."

"I forgot about the mortgage," said Bob, in quite another tone. "Yes, it is hard for uncle, I know; an' I mean to stay home an' help him all I can. It's tough fur me, too. I was thinkin', before you come up, how hard you an' uncle had worked all your life, an' with nothin' to show for't, as I can see. Uncle thinks there ain't no good in learnin', but I know that there are a good many ways that he could have done better if he had had more schoolin'; an' I don't want to go through my whole life an' not know more'n I do now."

"You ain't goin' to," was the soothing response. "You jest go on, an' do the very best you can, an' see if some way

don't open after a spell. I've often noticed, if we're careful to do that, it often does, quite onexpected."

Bob was up before the sun the next morning, and after taking an early breakfast, the uncle and nephew took their way down to the river, which was only a short distance from the house, and whose smooth surface was glittering in the light of the early dawn.

It was one of those mild, clear days that we sometimes have in the early part of December, and which seemed more like the early fall.

"It looks as if we was goin' ter have an open winter," said Mr. Brown, as they pushed off, rowing up the stream. "It was cold enough last year at this time."

Whether it was the influence of the bright and pleasant morning, or the comforting words of the preceding night, Bob's face wore its usual cheerful aspect.

Mr. Brown made no allusion to their conversation the evening before, but his nephew did not forget it if he did.

"I have slept upon what I said to you last night, uncle, and I'm of the same mind still."

"All right, lad. I hope you won't be sorry for't."

"I don't think I shall be—not for that," was the thoughtful response.

Then, a moment later:

"You'll keep baby?"

"Sartin. That is, if nobody comes that she belongs to."

"I don't mean to give her up, not if I can help it, to nobody but her mother; there hain't nobody else got any right to her. You wouldn't let those wicked men have her, uncle, who treated her so cruelly?"

"I wouldn't let nobody have her that would do her any harm, not if I knowed it," said Mr. Brown, whose slow, measured accents were in marked contrast to Bob's excited tone and manner.

"What's that over yonder?" exclaimed Bob, suddenly breaking the silence that followed.

"Where?" said Mr. Brown, shielding his eyes from the sun, and looking in the direction toward which the boy pointed.

"Why, there, right under those tall cliffs; don't you see it?"

"Yes, I do now," responded the other. "Looks like a wreck, as though there had been an accident. We'd better go and see."

Changing the course of the boat, they rowed to the opposite side, where the dark, beetling rocks rose up many feet above them.

The water had worn into the stone and earth so as to form a little curve or inlet, and here could be seen a long,

narrow, flat substance of some kind, which moved gently to and fro by the swelling of the tide, being kept in position by the rocks, whose sharp, jagged points could be seen so clearly beneath the clear, shallow water.

As they approached it, Bob rose up in the boat.

"Uncle!" he cried, excitedly, "it's a woman! I can see her dress and long, black hair."

Spurred on by this Mr. Brown urged the boat forward. Then he paused.

"We can't go any nearer without gittin' aground."

Bob's only reply was to roll up his trousers and spring into the water.

Wading along a few steps without letting go of the boat, Bob reached forward, and seizing a rope which was attached, as he now saw, to something which looked like a bed, drew it toward him, thus bringing the face of the person that lay on it clearly into view.

"Uncle!" screamed the boy, "it's her—the poor, pretty lady! She's tied with ropes on to this thing. Help me to get her free."

Without wasting any time in words, Mr. Brown took out his jack-knife, and both setting to work, the ropes were soon unbound, and the insensible form was lifted into the boat.

"Is she dead?" said Bob, as he chafed the cold hands, while his uncle doubled up his overcoat and placed it under the head.

"I don't know," responded Mr. Brown, as he looked down into the pale face and closed eyes; "if she is, she was dead 'fore she was put into the water, fur her face an' shoulders ain't the least mite wet, an' there ain't no bruise on her, as I can see."

The mattress had fallen in such a way as to leave the upper part of it higher than the lower, the ragged points of the rocks on which it lay keeping it in position; so that, while the feet were immersed in water, the head and shoulders were quite dry.

The elasticity of the substance on which she lay had prevented Geraldine from receiving any injurious effect from the fall. On the contrary, the shock of it, no doubt, preserved her life, as it tended to neutralize the deadening effect of the powerful drug she had inhaled.

A little distance from where the mattress lay a man's hat floated; no other trace being seen of Gaspardo, who, struck senseless by his fall, had gone down beneath the water, a fitting end to a life so wild and lawless.

"We had better take her to Dr. Graham's," said Bob. "It's the nearest place, an' then, being a doctor, he'll know jest what to do."

Impelled by the danger of any delay, the strong arms that held the oars sent the boat swiftly over the water.

As if roused by the rapid motion, Geraldine uttered a faint moan, unclosing her eyes, relapsing almost immediately into insensibility.

"She's alive!" cried Bob, as he noticed this. "Oh, uncle, if we can only get there in time!"

They soon came in sight of the place alluded to, Riverview, whose smoothly shaven lawn came down to the water.

There were broad stone steps leading to the river, on the banks of which was a boat-house.

Beyond could be seen the main building, whose deep windows and broad verandas and porticoes stood out very clearly from the belt of leafless trees that surrounded them.

A man was standing on the portico fronting the river; his pale face, and the manner in which he leaned against one of the pillars of it, showing him to be one of Dr. Graham's patients, a limited number of whom he treated at his own home.

Springing out of the boat, Bob ran up the steps, nor did he slacken his pace until he reached the man's side, to whom he cried, breathlessly:

"Where's Dr. Graham? We've found a woman in the river, that's only just alive!"

"The doctor is out," said the man.

Stepping up to an open window, the speaker notified some one inside, and then followed Bob down to the boat where Geraldine lay, looking, in her pallor and stillness, like some beautiful statue.

Bending over her, the man made a motion as if he would lift her up, and then, as if suddenly remembering his physical disability, stepped aside and let Bob take his place.

Assisted by his nephew, Mr. Brown took Geraldine up to the house, being met at the door by Mrs. Graham, who conducted them to her own room.

The good lady's sympathies were strongly moved as she looked at her unfortunate guest, and being, as the wife of a physician, well versed in the measures necessary in such cases, under her gentle ministrations something of her natural color and warmth returned to Geraldine's face. Opening her eyes, she looked around, but evidently took in no sense of her surroundings, as, after glancing wildly about, she murmured something and then closed them again.

"I wish Francis would come," said Mrs. Graham, ceasing, in evident perplexity, her renewed efforts at restoration.

Hearing a deep-drawn sigh, she looked around, being startled by the sight of her husband's patient standing in the open doorway.

"Mr. Smith!" she exclaimed, drawing the counterpane over Geraldine's uncovered shoulders.

"I beg pardon, but is there not something that I can do?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Graham, in a tone of displeasure. "What could *you* do here?"

Then remembering the doubts that her husband had expressed as to his patient's entire sanity, she added, in a gentler tone:

"If you would kindly watch for the doctor, telling him to come directly here?"

As if glad to be of service, Mr. Smith instantly disappeared.

In a few minutes Dr. Graham entered, to his wife's great relief, who gladly relinquished her charge to him.

Dr. Graham made a careful examination of his new patient.

"She is very ill," he said, in reply to his wife's inquiring look; "evidently suffering, not only from exposure, but from some heavy strain upon the nervous system. Her constitution, however, which seems to be strong and elastic, is greatly in her favor. You say that Mr. Brown and his nephew rescued her; where are they?"

"They are here; I asked them to stay until you came, thinking you would like to see them."

"That was right; I can tell better what to do for her if I know all the circumstances."

Half an hour later Dr. Graham and his wife were listening to Bob's account of all he knew about his strange patient, to which he listened with deep interest, but with less surprise than might be expected.

"It is a strange story," remarked the doctor, as Bob concluded, "almost incredible, I should say, if so many strange things did not come to my knowledge, in my profession, especially. The poor lady seems to have her worst enemies among those who should be her best friends, not an unusual circumstance, perhaps, though not often manifested in such a strange and cruel way."

"They must be very wicked people," responded Bob. "See how they treated baby—flung her out of the carriage as if she'd been nothin' but a dog! Aunt Jane says that if she hadn't been so wrapped up in flannel she'd been killed sure! There's the mark on her forehead now. Such a pretty little thing, too, with big black eyes jist like her mother's. You couldn't help lovin' her if you tried."

Dr. Graham smiled kindly into the speaker's flushed and earnest face.

"They have found a warm friend in you, it seems?"

"That they have!" was the prompt response. "And in you, too, I hope, sir."

"I shall certainly do all I can for them," said the doctor, a little gravely.

"And you won't give her up to those bad men who hate her so?"

"Assuredly not. On the contrary, I shall do all I can to protect her. It is not always easy to decide what is best to do under given circumstances," added the doctor, as he turned to the door. "The lady is very ill now, being threatened with a fever. The best thing to do for her now is to see that she has the best medical care and nursing that are possible."

"And I may come to see her, mayn't I?"

"Certainly, my boy. Come any time you like. You have the best of all rights to do so. In all human probability, you have been instrumental in saving her life, as well as that of her baby. You are a brave, honest boy, and I am proud to know you."

Dr. Graham shook hands with Bob, as he said this, whose face flushed with almost as much embarrassment as pleasure.

Mr. Brown was present during this interview, though in accordance with his usual habit he said nothing, except to answer a few questions that were asked him.

Dr. Graham's words of commendation to his nephew made a strong impression on him, and he was very silent and thoughtful on their way home.

"Wife always said that there's somethin' more'n common in Bob," he mused; "an' I don't know but what she's in the rights on't."

Bob's thoughts, though busy, were very different, being entirely fixed on the strange and delightful news he had to tell his aunt.

Though their way back was down the river, instead of up, and the light boat moved very swiftly along on its smooth, clear surface, it seemed to his excited and impatient heart that they would never reach the place from whence it started.

"How glad aunt will be to know that baby's mother is found," he said, as he sprung from the boat, "and how astonished, too. We never could have believed that such a strange thing could have happened when we left home!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

WHEN Mrs. Graham returned to Geraldine she found that quite a change had come over her, her cheeks being flushed and her eyes brilliant with the fever that had begun to run riot in her veins.

She had aroused to consciousness enough to take some cognizance of her surroundings; but it was all colored with the delirious fantasies so common under the circumstances.

Lifting her eyes to the sweet, compassionate face that bent over her, she said:

"Oh, I know; I have left the world. You are one of the angels. I don't suppose my husband cares to come—perhaps he will when he knows how sorry I am; but please bring me my baby. It died only a few days ago, and will be fretting for me."

There was an indescribable pathos in these words, especially the tone in which they were spoken, and there were tears in Mrs. Graham's eyes, as she assured the poor mother that her child was in good hands, and she should see her in the morning.

But when the morning came, and, accompanied by Bob, Mrs. Brown had, in compliance with the message that was sent her, brought Isabel to Riverview, the fever had made such rapid headway that she was in no condition to recognize her baby, or to make her presence advisable or even safe for either.

Geraldine remained in this condition for several days, passing from a state of such wild delirium as to necessitate constant watchfulness, and even physical restraint, to the dull stupor of exhaustion.

In the former state she raved incessantly; her wrongs and sufferings, especially her guilt and remorse, were continually upon her tongue.

It was a little curious, though the doctor and his wife listened attentively, anxious to obtain some clew to her home and family, that she mentioned no names.

Sometimes the fear that she had done so would arise in her mind.

"Have I spoken anybody's name?" she would say. "I must not. I took a solemn oath kissing the cross, that I would mention no names."

And only the repeated assurance that she had not done this would calm her distress and excitement.

The fever ran so long, requiring such incessant watchfulness by night and day, that Dr. Graham's household would have been worn out by the constant demands upon it, had

it not been for the assistance volunteered by Mr. Smith, his kind-hearted but eccentric patient—if such he could be called, having been convalescent for some weeks.

He made himself useful in a variety of ways, especially in aiding the doctor to soothe and restrain Geraldine in her frenzy, during which she had more than once tried to fling herself from the window.

He rarely spoke, but the touch of his hand upon her, his very presence, seemed to have a wonderful calming effect upon her.

During the course of his long practice, Dr. Graham had occasionally met with those possessing this power over the disordered mind, always observing that such generally had peculiarly strong, tender, self-centered natures, so it produced no other effect on him than to induce him to count upon his aid, whenever needed, and to increase his confidence and respect.

"In spite of Mr. Smith's oddities, and they, certainly, are not few," remarked Dr. Graham to his wife, "I can't help liking the man. I don't think that I ever had more efficient help in a sick-room. He seems to know just what to do, and is so quiet about it, and is never in the way when not wanted. And then to think of a man of his apparent means taking so much trouble for an entire stranger. It can proceed from nothing but pure kindness of heart. Not that any one can help being interested in our very interesting patient! I take a deep interest in her myself; and, if you were like some women I know of, you would be jealous."

Mrs. Graham smiled; her faith in her husband was founded on a rock, and her interest in the stranger, thrown so strangely upon their care and protection, quite as strong as his.

The two listened to Geraldine's incoherent ravings, her strong self-accusations, her agony and remorse, with strange feelings at their hearts.

Were these the wild imaginings of a disordered mind, or had they a basis in fact?

One day Mr. Smith stood by the bed, holding a basin of water, in which Mrs. Graham was bathing the hot hands and forehead.

"It is of no use," she said, holding up her right hand and surveying it with wild, glittering eyes. "See! nothing can wash away the blood-red stains there!"

In the afternoon Bob crept softly in, as he often did, his heart full of pity for the "pretty lady," who lay there so changed and wasted, taking no apparent heed of him or any one.

Mr. Smith, who happened to be the only one that was

present, was standing at the foot of the bed, in the deep shadow of the heavy curtains that fell around it.

Geraldine was apparently lying in a half-doze, and the boy stood looking at her for some moments without speaking.

Then approaching Mr. Smith, he said:

"Do you think she is any better?"

"I do not know. She is, certainly, no worse."

"Oh! I do hope she will live! It will be such a terrible thing to have her die."

"There is nothing terrible but sin, boy," was the almost stern response.

As if roused by the sound of these voices, Geraldine's eyes flew open.

"Robert!" she cried, stretching out her hand.

"She speaks your name; go to her," said Mr. Smith.

Gently pushing the boy forward, the speaker retreated toward the door.

He met Dr. Graham just outside, who gazed fixedly at him for a moment.

"You are looking pale, and no wonder. You have had little or no rest for some days. If you don't take better care of yourself, I shall have you on the sick list next."

"It is nothing. I am not very strong, as yet; it is hardly to be expected that I should be. Your patient requires your immediate attention. There is a change in her, though of what nature I cannot tell."

Dr. Graham went immediately to Geraldine's room, where he remained nearly half an hour.

When he returned he found Mr. Smith sitting in the same position in which he left him.

"The fever has left her," said the doctor, as Mr. Smith lifted his head from the hands upon which it was resting, "and she is sleeping."

"And the result?"

"That cannot be stated with any degree of certainty. Her naturally fine constitution is in her favor, so that I have rather more hope than fear, still she is very low. If she wakens she will live; if she dies, she will never wake."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. SMITH.

THERE was a solemn hush in Dr. Graham's household; even the servants moved about with gentle step and subdued voices, their hearts and sympathies with the pale, wasted form that was lying in that quiet chamber, and

which might never waken to the light of an earthly morning.

She lay in this state for some hours; the pulse only just perceptible, and the breath coming so faintly from the slightly-parted lips, that sometimes it could hardly be seen that she breathed at all.

Mr. Smith came in, looking down upon the still, white face.

"Is she living?" he said, turning to Dr. Graham, who was standing beside him.

"Yes, but the life is very small."

"Is there any more hope?"

"There is no change for the better or the worse. Her youth and constitution are on her side. If she wakes, so as to be able to take nourishment and restoratives, the chances are in her favor."

Had Geraldine been the only and petted daughter of the household, instead of a nameless stranger, she could hardly have been watched with more anxious, devoted, and watchful care. But there was little to be done now, except to watch the scales that hung so tremblingly in the balance, to see on which side it would turn.

Mr. Smith did not go into Geraldine's room again, keeping his own room much of the time, which, aside from his natural aversion to society, was not strange, as he must have been not a little worn and weary.

But he often saw her from the hall, out of which her room opened, whose width and windows scarcely made it look like one, moving up and down it with the slow, measured step peculiar to him.

At one of these times the doctor accosted him with a bright smile on his face.

"Our patient has waked with her mind perfectly clear and collected."

The face that confronted the speaker was a little more colorless than usual, but there was no other change there as he said:

"You think she will recover, then?"

"Unless something new sets in. She has taken some nourishment, and her pulse is stronger. But come in and judge for yourself."

Mr. Smith drew back.

"Impossible. I leave on the next train for New York."

"On the next train?" said the doctor, in a tone of surprise. "Is not this very sudden and unexpected?"

"Oh, no; I have had it in contemplation for some days. My business is there, and now that I am fully recovered, I must attend to it."

Dr. Graham took a careful survey of the speaker,

"But *are* you fully recovered?"

Something approaching to a smile brightened the grave face.

"I am on the road to it. I have not recovered my full strength yet, but that will come. You have been very patient and forbearing with me, and I owe you more than money can repay. But that must not be forgotten."

Dr. Graham glanced at the check that was placed in his hand.

"I cannot conscientiously take so much as this, Mr. Smith. You have been no more than a boarder for the last three weeks, besides being of great service to me in regard to this poor lady."

"Pray oblige me, doctor. I have a large income, with none to share it, and it is, really, your just due. As for the other matter you refer to, it was simply a matter of common humanity. I apprehend that you expect no remuneration from that quarter for all your expense and trouble?"

"Well, no; it does not seem very probable. But we doctors are used to giving our time and services. And, then, this is a peculiar case, awakening more than usual sympathy and interest."

"Very true. I feel this in some degree myself, and should be glad to know——"

Here Mr. Smith hesitated, as if a little doubtful of the ground he was venturing upon.

"Of course," said Dr. Graham, hastily. "Considering all the trouble you have taken, it is very natural that you should. Give me your address, and I will let you know how she gets along."

Mr. Smith was so long in replying that the doctor raised his eyes from the note-book that he had taken from his pocket.

"I will communicate with you," said the former, as he met that inquiring look.

Then returning from the door to which he had abruptly turned, he added:

"I have only time to reach the station before the train leaves. Present my adieus to Mrs. Graham, together with my thanks for all her kindness."

"What a strange genius!" thought Dr. Graham as he looked after him. "He's gone as strangely as he came."

As weak as an infant, it was some days before there was any perceptible change in Geraldine; but when she began to mend, she did so with great rapidity, so that in less than three weeks, she was able to leave her bed, though she looked like only the shadow of her former self.

At the early period of her convalescence she had ex-

pressed disappointment and regret at being brought back to an existence so full of pain and sorrow.

"If my baby had only lived!" she said. "But now there is nothing."

And finding that she was likely to slip away from life, from the mere fact of having nothing to attach herself to it, Dr. Graham decided to let Bob, who claimed this privilege, take Isabel in to her.

The result of this experiment, which was somewhat risky on account of her weak state at this time, was all that could be desired.

Large tears rolled down the pale cheeks of the poor young mother as the child was placed in her arms that she supposed had met with so cruel a fate. But they were tears of joy and gratitude, which did much to ease her heart of its heavy weight of pain.

She asked no questions, seeming to think of and care for nothing save to feel that it was in her arms again.

Later, Bob related how and where he found Isabel, and all the circumstances connected with it.

Shuddering, Geraldine held the child more closely to her heart as she listened; but she expressed no surprise, and made no comments.

There were no marks on the garments worn by their guest to indicate her name, but there had been a ring on one of her wasted fingers, which, being too loose to be worn safely, Mrs. Graham took charge of, on the inside of which was the name of Geraldine.

Perceiving that she responded to this in some degree, even when most delirious, Mrs. Graham called her by it, her husband altering it in time to Mrs. Geraldine, by which title she became known to the rest of the household.

Bob had become a member of the family, Dr. Graham employing him in the house and garden, paying him regular wages.

The lad was greatly delighted at this arrangement, as it not only enabled him to see "his baby," as he always called Isabel, but her mother, for whom he still retained his boyish affection and admiration.

Geraldine was fully conscious of all that she owed the honest, warm-hearted boy, though she showed it less by her words than manner.

It got to be a very common thing to see the three together, whenever Bob was at leisure.

One day, Geraldine had been watching the two—Bob and Isabel—who were having a frolic upon the porch, by the open window of which she was sitting.

Entering the house, Bob placed the child, flushed and laughing, upon her mother's knee.

Geraldine's eyes moistened, as she looked from one to the other.

"If it were not for you, Robert, I should have no little Isabel; my heart and arms would be empty."

The boy's face flushed with pride and pleasure.

"I'm so glad that I found her! Oh, Mrs. Geraldine, I think that it must have been God that sent me through those dark, lonesome woods! There was another way that I could have gone, and which I often take at night."

Geraldine smiled softly into the clear, earnest eyes that were lifted to hers.

"It must have been He that directed your course up the river. If you had not found me as you did, baby would have no mother."

This was the first time that Geraldine had made any allusion to the dark tragedy of her past life; and, as if the remembrances it aroused were more than she could endure, hiding her face in the clustering curls of the child that was clinging to her neck, she hastily left the room.

It was a mild and pleasant evening in the early spring, and when Geraldine returned she found Dr. Graham and his wife seated on the porch entirely by themselves.

This was precisely what Geraldine wanted, and she certainly had no reason to fear either, still the words she felt constrained to say were not an easy thing to utter, and there was a little tremor in her voice, as she said:

"My friends, you have been very kind to the friendless and nameless stranger, far kinder than I had any right to expect, but now that health and strength have returned to me, I feel that I ought to trespass on your hospitality no longer."

After looking in her husband's face for the encouragement that she never failed to find there for any kindness she meditated, Mrs. Graham said:

"I hope that nothing has been said or done to make you feel that you were burdensome?"

"On the contrary, you have done everything that is possible to make my stay with you pleasant. You have not only been exceptionally kind to me, but have done it in the kindest possible way. But this only makes it more incumbent upon me to act justly and kindly by you. I am now strong enough to earn my own living, and ask you to aid me in my endeavors to do so."

The husband and wife looked at each other for some moments in silent perplexity. Then Dr. Graham said, glancing a little gravely at the soft, white hands of the speaker:

"You do not look as if you were used to work. I have no wish to be inquisitive or to pry into anything that you

may wish to keep secret, but is there no friend or relative to whom you have a right to look?"

Geraldine shuddered at the retrospection occasioned by these words.

"No one.

"I know how strange my conduct must seem to you," added Geraldine, breaking the silence that followed; "and, worse than all, how impossible it is for me to say anything that will make you consider it in any other light. You have not only the best of all rights to my fullest confidence, but it would be an untold relief to me to be able to unburden to you a heart so ladened with sin and sorrow. But this may not be. In regard to my past life, my lips are sealed, and ever must be. But this I can tell you. I have only two living relatives in the world, and those two seek my life, and would have taken it if something scarcely less than a miracle had not delivered me from them. I dread nothing so much as falling again into their cruel and pitiless hands."

Both surprise and compassion were in Dr. Graham's eyes as he met that terrified, appealing look.

"My dear Mrs. Geraldine, you surely have no reason to fear them now? The strong arm of the law can be invoked to shield you from such high-handed measures as these."

"God forbid that I should ever have to appeal to it. It would give me inexpressible pain to be obliged to do so. Such a course would be perilous, and not to me only; bringing undeserved shame and sorrow upon innocent heads.

"You look surprised," continued Geraldine, as she met the wondering eyes of her listeners. "But if all my dark and sorrowful life could be laid open before you—as it never can be—you would see that this is the only and best course for me to take. The two persons I have alluded to think me dead, and my only hope for peace and safety consists in their continuing to think so. It is as though all my past life was a blank, and I was beginning a new one, which had nothing whatever to do with the old. The question is, will you help me to live this new life?"

"I—we both—will help you all we can, you may be sure of that," said Dr. Graham. "In relation to earning your own support, you may be happier, under the circumstances, to do so, as it will give you something to occupy your time and thoughts. The next question is, what can you best do?"

"My education qualifies me to teach nearly, if not quite, all the branches that young ladies pursue, but I should not like to take any position that would separate me from

Isabel. On her account, I should prefer that of a nursery governess, and would be willing to take a very low salary if I can have my little girl with me."

"Do you know of anybody needing any one in that capacity, my dear?" said Dr. Graham, turning to his wife.

"I can't think of any one, just now, but I presume I shall."

Then, after a little thought:

"There is Mr. Smith, Francis, why not apply to him? He is a man of means and position, and might know of some opening in that or some other direction."

"Very true. And he has seemed to take, in his odd way, some interest in our friend."

"Mr. Smith is the gentleman I told you about," added Dr. Graham, turning to Geraldine. "He made himself very serviceable when you were so ill and delirious. I hardly know how we should have got along without him. He went away before you were able to take much notice of anything, so I suppose that you have no recollection of him?"

"I have a dim recollection of some one whose presence seemed to give me rest and peace. But it is so vague, and mixed up with—with other things—that I thought—perhaps, I dreamed it."

"No, you didn't dream it. I don't wonder that it seems unreal to you, though, for you were about as wild and delirious a patient as I ever had. Mr. Smith could manage you, though. How he did it, I don't know. He scarcely ever spoke, and then only a word or two, but you always seemed calmer when he was by. Taking him altogether, Mr. Smith is a very peculiar man, one not easy to fathom. But, with all his oddities, he has a vein of good sense and good feeling that makes it impossible for one not to like him. He wrote several times after he left—or, rather, his secretary did—to inquire after you."

"How long is it since we have had a letter from him?" added the doctor, turning to his wife.

"Five or six weeks, I should say."

"Supposing you should write him, my dear, stating what Mrs. Geraldine desires to do, and asking if he can aid her in any way? It will do no harm."

"So I will; a letter shall go out the very next mail."

CHAPTER XXVII.

GERALDINE'S FAIRY GODMOTHER.

MRS. GRAHAM was as good as her word, her letter to Mr. Smith going out in the next mail; the hopefulness with which she viewed this effort in her behalf infusing into

Geraldine's heart a feeling of quiet and security that she had not experienced for many a day.

If she could only be allowed to win her own and her child's bread in peace and safety, no matter how much toil and hardship it might involve, how glad she would be.

With this thought uppermost in her mind, Geraldine approached the steps of the porch on which Bob was sitting, who looked up at her with the same glad and loving smile with which he always greeted her, though there was more than usual thoughtfulness in his face and tone, as he said:

"I heard Dr. Graham speak to his wife a little while ago as if you were goin' to get some work to do to support yourself an' baby. If I was only a man you should not work at all; I would work for you."

"Work is far from being the worst thing in the world, Robert; it is sometimes a great blessing. I only wish I was sure of getting it to do."

Bob did not speak for some minutes, looking as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

When he did it was apparently on a very different subject.

"When you told me the fairy story last evening you said that you shouldn't mind having a fairy godmother yourself, for a little while; was it that she might bring you money?"

Geraldine was a little touched, as well as surprised, at the aptness with which the boy read her thoughts.

"Yes. Not a great deal though; just sufficient to get baby and baby's mother a modest outfit in case they should go among strangers, as they may have to do."

There was a roguish, exultant look in Bob's eyes.

"Now, suppose *I* was your fairy godmother?"

Geraldine smiled as she looked at the sturdy form that was certainly not very fairy-like in its proportions, and then looked very grave.

"And so you have been, Robert, and in more ways than one."

"You know the morning that I first saw you?"

"Indeed I do; it is something that I shall not soon forget."

"Nor I nuther. I can see you now standin' by the fence, with baby in your arms. Did you lose anything?"

"Lose anything?"

"Yes. Did you drop anything from your pocket—anything like this?" added the boy, taking something from his own and laying it in Geraldine's lap.

Geraldine looked down in mingled amazement and thankfulness upon the lost porte-monnaie.

"And did you find it, my dear boy?"

"Yes; I found it in the road when I went back to the corner to meet those two men on horseback. I thought it was yours, so I kept it for you."

Geraldine opened the porte-monnaie, finding there every penny of the coin and bills that she had placed there so many weeks before.

"It could hardly come in a better time," she said. "The good doctor and his wife have offered to supply all my needs, but they are far from rich, having many outgoes, and I do not like to put them to any further expense. They have been to a great deal of trouble and expense for me already.

"You have, indeed, been a fairy godmother to me," added Geraldine, stooping and kissing the boy's forehead; "I hope the day will come when I shall be able to be a fairy godmother to you."

Geraldine was now very busy in fashioning garments for herself and Isabel, with the assistance of Mrs. Graham, who entered, heart and soul, into all that concerned her *protegee*, making rapid progress in her work.

Riverview stood upon the edge of a small village.

There was only one mail from New York, and that one not always on time.

"We can hardly expect a reply before Saturday," said Mrs. Graham, in response to Geraldine's query as to when she expected to hear from her letter. "Mr. Smith will be sure to reply. Or, rather, his secretary will; he never seems to write letters himself."

Geraldine had heard so much about this quondam patient and boarder, that she felt not a little curious about him.

"He was very good to me, you say," she said, after a litte pause; "I wish he had stayed longer, so I could have thanked him."

"I wish you could have seen Mr. Smith. I think you would have liked him, though I hardly think that he would have cared for thanks. I have noticed that anything of the sort always seemed to displease, or, at least, make him feel uncomfortable."

"I should like to see him, anyway, and hope I shall some time. He must be a very uncommon character."

"So he is. He isn't a man easy to read. In fact, I never could quite understand him. But I liked him, and so does Francis. He is a person that one instinctively trusts. He said very little, but you could not help feeling that he meant all he said."

"He was a patient of Dr. Graham's?"

"Yes, Though never ill enough to keep his room, ex-

cept the first few days; he looked very pale and thin when he first came. I think that he told Francis that he had had an accident, which had given a severe shock to his nervous system. He was a good deal better when he left, but I don't think he was quite well and strong."

"And he wrote to inquire about me?"

"Yes, several times; in fact, I think I have his last letter, if you would like to see it?"

The letter that Geraldine took from the speaker's hand was very brief, running as follows:

"DEAR DOCTOR,—Many thanks for your promptness in answering my inquiries concerning your patient.

"Now that she is able to be about, having recovered her usual health and strength, or nearly so, I will not trouble you further.

"If there is anything that I can do for you, or any one, I hope you will not fail to let me know. Yours truly,

"R. B. SMITH,
"Per A., Private Sec."

Geraldine betrayed more emotion as she read this than the case seemed to warrant.

"The handwriting is a—a—rather peculiar," she said, studying it curiously for some moments, and then putting it away, as though it stirred unpleasant memories.

"It isn't Mr. Smith's, you know," said Mrs. Graham, looking up in some surprise at the speaker's perplexed face. "It is written, like all the others, by his private secretary. He came here once or twice to see his employer. But that was before you came."

"Did you see him?"

"No; Francis did. He said he had a sort of foreign look and way with him."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STRANGE AND JOYFUL SURPRISE.

"I AM going down-town, my dear. Have you or Mrs. Geraldine any commissions for me?"

It was Dr. Graham who spoke, suddenly making his appearance upon the threshold of the quiet room where the two ladies were sitting.

"I don't know what Geraldine may have," responded his wife, looking up from her sewing; "I have nothing, except to remind you not to forget to go to the post-office. The mail must be in."

"Something which I believe I never do forget, you have such a very extensive correspondence, my love. Who are you expecting to hear from now?"

"I might hear from various people," was the demure

response. "There's Brother Will, Uncle James, and Cousin Lucy, that I haven't heard from for an age, to say nothing of many others of our numerous kith and kin. And then there is—Mr. Smith. It is over a week since I wrote him; and he is always so punctual."

"So it is. I mailed it, myself, last Tuesday; and it is quite time, under ordinary circumstances, that you had an answer. But then he may be out of town, or waiting to make inquiries concerning what you wrote him."

Geraldine, who was present, said nothing, looking from one to the other with a quiet intentness peculiar to her, and which showed the subject they were discussing to be of no little interest to her.

It was noticeable that she changed her seat not long after, taking one by a window which commanded a view of the avenue down which Dr. Graham rode on his way to town, and by which she knew he would return.

Mrs. Graham might have guessed her motive for this, for she said:

"I shouldn't wonder if we heard from Mr. Smith to-day. If we don't, I shall think that he is waiting, as Francis says, for the purpose of writing something definite."

In the course of an hour Dr. Graham made his appearance.

Taking several papers and one letter from his coat pocket, he tossed the latter into his wife's lap, exclaiming:

"There it is, my dear. 'Long looked for, come at last.'"

The letter was directed to Mrs. Graham, in the same angular, and, as Geraldine had remarked, somewhat peculiar hand of the one she had examined a few days previously.

Mrs. Graham was not long in making herself mistress of its contents, and which seemed to give her undisguised satisfaction.

"I declare," she exclaimed, a little incoherently, "if Mr. Smith isn't the dearest man in the world! Such a fortunate thing that I wrote to him!"

"Dear me," said the doctor, in mock amazement and despair, "I thought that *I* was the dearest man in the world! And now it seems that it's some other man."

"And so you are, in *my* world," laughed his wife; "but in Geraldine's, if I mistake not, Mr. Smith will bear away the palm."

"I am sure that there couldn't be anything more satisfactory and desirable," she added, turning to Geraldine. "Read the letter; it concerns you more than any one, and you can judge for yourself."

Geraldine took the letter that was handed her, glanced at it, and then returned it, saying:

"Will you kindly read it to me?"

"Certainly. Francis would like to hear it, too, I dare say."

"That I should," responded the doctor, with a sly twinkle of the eye. "I should like to know what the dearest man in the world has to say for himself."

"He hasn't anything to say for himself," retorted Mrs. Graham; "he never does have."

"Very true," responded her husband. "Mr. Smith has as little to say for himself as any man I ever saw; a very good thing, too, if it isn't carried too far. Now for the letter, which has seemed to make you so happy."

"It is for Geraldine's sake," said Mrs. Graham, glancing at our heroine. Observing the impatient and expectant look there, she unfolded the letter, reading as follows:

"'DEAR MADAM,—I should have replied to your kind favor earlier had I not been out of town for the last few days. I now write to say that I shall not only be very glad to serve you in the way you mention, but trust that it will open the door for me to be relieved in some measure from a responsibility that rests very heavily upon me.

"'A few months ago, by a series of painful circumstances, unnecessary, and which, indeed, I have no right, to reveal, I became the guardian of a lovely and intelligent boy of about six, who has been deprived of both parents.

"'While I take the deepest possible interest in my ward, there are circumstances, unnecessary, and indeed impossible, to explain, which place it beyond my power to have him under my own personal supervision, as, otherwise, I would be glad to do.

"'I have had him boarded in a private family, who have attended carefully to his physical wants, trying to supply his loss, so far as they know how. I have no particular fault to find with them.

"'Still it is evident that the boy is not happy there; the poor little fellow pines after his mother, to whom he was strongly attached. And your letter has suggested to me the possibility that the lady of whom you speak in such high terms may be able to supply in some degree a mother's place to him.

"'Lionel is a boy that no woman, especially a mother, can help loving——'"

"Lionel, did you say?" interrupted Geraldine.

Somewhat startled at this abrupt and unexpected query, Mrs. Graham examined the word carefully.

"Yes, Lionel."

Recollecting herself, Geraldine drew back still further into the shadow of the corner where she sat.

"I beg pardon; go on," she said, in a tone husky with suppressed emotion.

"'Lionel is a boy that no woman, especially a mother, can help loving,'" resumed Mrs. Graham; "'and as your young *protegee* has a little girl, about the same age of a baby sister he lost, thus insuring him a little playmate, I can but hope that this change will have a most happy effect upon the boy, who has suffered both in health and spirits from the grief and loneliness consequent upon his sad bereavement.'

"Poor little fellow!" interpolated Mrs. Graham, whose heart was as warm and open as the day, "I wish he were here now. But just hear the rest.

"'Being the heir to a large estate, the terms will be proportionably liberal, consisting of five hundred a year, exclusive of board for both and all the boy's incidental expenses.

"'I hardly need add that no menial labor will be required of her; nothing but the love, care, and instruction that she would naturally bestow upon her own child.

"'Should be glad to have my ward at Riverview, at least through the warm weather, on account of its pure air and pleasant surroundings. When cool weather comes, I will, if found necessary, make other arrangements.

"'I had nearly forgotten to say that my ward's name is Lionel Bayard.

"'Be good enough to let me hear from you by return of mail.

"'My private secretary will take the boy to Riverview as soon as I learn that the arrangements named are satisfactory to all parties. Respectfully,

"'R. B. SMITH,

"'Per A., Private Sec'y.'"

Fortunately Mrs. Graham was too much absorbed in her own thoughts and feelings to notice with what deep and strange emotions Geraldine listened to this letter, and which were so vividly portrayed by the dilated eyes and alternately flushed and paling cheek, but which the shadow in which she sat failed to bring very clearly into view.

"Isn't it delightful news, my dear Geraldine?" said Mrs. Graham, breaking the little pause that followed. "The salary is liberal, far more so than could be expected, and the duties light—only one pupil—and then you can have your own dear little girl with you. And, best of all to me, you will not have to leave Riverview. I should be very lonely if you were to go, for I am really getting to be very fond of you."

This long and characteristic speech gave Geraldine time

to recover in some degree from the agitation that at first threatened to be too strong for her self-control.

With cheek very pale and eyes full of tears, she said, tremulously:

"God is very good to me, dear friends—far better than you think, or I have any right to expect or ask. Tell this noble-hearted man that I accept the trust he offers me, and will do my best to deserve it. In the meantime, if you do not need the letter to answer it, will you let me take it to my room, where I can examine it more carefully?"

"Certainly. I shall not need the letter, as all I have to say in reply is that the arrangements he proposes will be very satisfactory to you and all of us. That is what you wish me to say, I suppose?"

"Yes; so far as I am concerned, no arrangement could be so pleasant and desirable."

Mrs. Graham looked at her husband as Geraldine left the room.

"It can't be wondered at that she should be somewhat overcome, poor thing! It was quite a surprise to me—something that I didn't at all expect. But did you notice, Francis, how pale she was, and how strangely she looked? It don't seem to me that she can be quite well and strong yet."

"It is very evident that she is very far from strong, my dear," replied the doctor, "nor is it to be wondered at. People don't get up very soon from so serious an illness as hers; it is apt to leave more or less of weakness for some months."

Geraldine went directly to her own room. Bolting the door, she read the letter that had brought such unexpected and welcome tidings to her, line by line, dwelling with maternal pride and fondness on all that related to her boy. For it was, oh, happy thought!—*her* boy it spoke of.

Sinking down beside the bed, Geraldine's grateful and happy tears fell fast.

"I shall hold Lionel, my poor lost boy, in my arms!" she sobbed. "I thank Thee, O God, that Thou hast, in Thy just wrath, remembered mercy!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A STRANGE MEETING.

THE days that intervened before the advent of her expected guest at Riverview were very busy ones to Mrs. Graham, whose kind, sympathetic nature made her bent on making everything as pleasant as possible to all concerned.

Geraldine's room was in the east wing. It contained two other good-sized and pleasant rooms.

The smaller of these, and which opened out of Geraldine's, Mrs. Graham had designed as a bed-room for her boy-guest, fitting it up with everything that she could think of, that was pretty and attractive; the other one was to be the school-room.

Geraldine was consulted in regard to every detail, Mrs. Graham following every hint and suggestion, so far as it was practicable.

"It is very easy to see that you are a mother," smiled that lady, as Geraldine suggested some addition that had not occurred to her. "We are very happy, Francis and I, and I suppose my husband pets and makes more of me than if he had children upon which to lavish his surplus affection. Still I must confess that it is a great disappointment to me that I have been debarred from this crowning joy of wedded love. The house has seemed quite another place since your dear little girl came into it. And now I am looking with real pleasure to the coming of this boy."

"You will love him; you can't help it," said Geraldine, a little incautiously.

Then catching Mrs. Graham's surprised glance, she added, hastily:

"That is to say, if all be true that Mr. Smith says of him."

He is at a very interesting age, at all events," responded Mrs. Graham. "I only hope he will be contented. Poor little fellow! to think of his being deprived of both parents so young. Isn't it sad?"

"Very," said Geraldine, in tones that she vainly endeavored to render steady.

"My dear Geraldine," said Mrs. Graham, as she caught a glimpse of the speaker's quivering lips and tearful eyes.

"I beg pardon," faltered Geraldine, "but I am not very strong, as yet. You will understand something of my feelings when I tell you that I lost a boy of about the age of this one, and it brought it all back fresh to my mind"

"I think my boy must have been a little younger when I lost him," added Geraldine, smiling through her tears into the sympathetic face of her listener. "You, my kind, good friend, who have been denied a mother's joy, have been spared a mother's agony in the loss of her darling."

"But I can feel for those who have sustained it. And I hope that the boy that is coming will take, in some degree at least, the place of the boy you have lost."

"I hope he may. It predisposes me, at all events, to receive him with more tenderness and affection, and to take more interest in him."

Here the conversation ceased, much to Geraldine's relief.

This first and brief allusion to her past life was a matter of policy—or, rather, necessity with her. It might tend to explain not only the agitation that she had already manifested, but what it might be impossible for her to entirely repress at her meeting with Lionel, and which she feared would arouse suspicions that would prove disastrous to all her hopes.

It was the morning of the day on which Lionel was expected, and Geraldine stood before the mirror in her own room looking with sad, inquiring eyes into the face from which all the bloom and brightness had vanished, making it seem strange even to herself.

Would her boy recognize her?

As this was something to be feared and avoided, she experienced a feeling of satisfaction and relief as she noted the change there.

Her long and beautiful hair had fallen out, so that she had been necessitated to wear a cap to conceal its loss, which added not a little to her changed appearance.

True, it was coming out now, soft and thick, and with a natural wave in it that added to its beauty; so that when Mrs. Graham surprised her without the cap, one day, she urged its discontinuance, declaring it to be a shame for her to disfigure herself so.

But Geraldine had her own private reasons for declining to do this.

"I think that I will wear it for the present," she smiled; "at least until my hair is a little longer."

Her clear, soft, musical voice; her jetty eyes with their long curved lashes, were all that remained unchanged, and these she hoped to be able to disguise sufficiently for the attainment of her purpose.

For obvious reasons, Geraldine decided that her first meeting with Lionel should have as few spectators as possible. In order to make this practicable, she resolved to be in her own room at the time of his arrival.

The boy was not expected until late in the afternoon, and, as it began to wear away, there was no necessity for Geraldine to feign the headache that was to enable her to carry her design into execution.

There was a dull, throbbing pain in the temples, born of the heavy strain made upon her nervous system by the hard and unnatural part that she was forced to act.

From the windows of her own room Geraldine watched the carriage disappear down the avenue that had been sent to meet the train, and then lying down upon the lounge, endeavored to still the quivering nerves and throbbing

pulses to a successful encounter of the ordeal through which she must soon pass.

She had hardly done this, when Mrs. Graham made her appearance to inquire how she was.

"It is nothing more serious than a headache," said Geraldine, with a faint smile, "which will be quite gone in the morning. Pat has gone to the station, I understand. I wish that you would send the boy up-stairs to me as soon as he returns."

"But won't it be bad for your head, my dear Geraldine?" said Mrs. Graham, as she noticed the speaker's pale face and heavy eyes.

"On the contrary, it will do me good. Let him come up to me quietly, as though his finding me here, in the next room to his own, was the most natural thing in the world. In this way he may attach me, in some degree, with the mother he has lost, and thus make it much pleasanter for us both. There is a good deal in first impressions, you know."

"Very true. Children are so unconventional, that a formal introduction might make him feel shy and uncomfortable. I'll take him up, myself; and after showing him his pretty room and telling him who you are, leave him to get acquainted himself."

Both Dr. and Mrs. Graham were upon the porch when Pat lifted Lionel from the carriage.

The two were not long in reaching his side.

The boy had evidently been well brought up. He shook hands with the doctor, submitting to, but not returning, the kiss that his wife pressed upon each cheek.

There was a disappointed, wistful look in the dark eyes that searched Mrs. Graham's face, which gave her "an odd sort of feeling," as she expressed it afterward.

"Are you well, my dear?"

"I'm pretty well, thank you, ma'am," said the boy, his eyes roving about as though in search of something or somebody that he could not find.

Holding Lionel by the hand, Mrs. Graham now led him into the general sitting-room, the boy giving every part of it the same silent, disappointed scrutiny.

"I thought, perhaps, I should find my mamma here?"

Startled by these unexpected words, Mrs. Graham was silent for some moments. Then she said:

"Your mamma is dead, isn't she?"

The boy's eyes suddenly dilated.

"Papa never said she was; nobody ever said she was. Is my papa dead, too?"

"Goodness me!" thought Mrs. Graham, "what a strange child!"

Then aloud:

"Your dear papa and mamma are in heaven, and if you are a good boy, you will go and see them some day. Now, if you'll come with me, I will show you your pretty new room, and the kind lady who is going to have the care of you."

The stopping of the carriage wheels that brought Lionel to Riverview came very distinctly to the strained ears that were watching for them.

Rising from the lounge, Geraldine went to the mirror, carefully adjusting her cap over the short, wavy hair that covered her head.

As she stood thus, looking at the reflection there, as though it were some other face than hers, she heard steps ascending the stairs.

Her heart beat almost to suffocation as there floated to her ear the clear, childish voice so familiar to her, in which there was a minor key, never heard in it before, and which went straight to the mother's heart.

As the steps came nearer and nearer, an almost irresistible impulse came over Geraldine to rush forward and clasp her boy to her heart.

Controlling herself with a strong effort, she drew a shawl around her shoulders, seating herself in a large easy-chair in the furthest corner of the room.

There were two doors to Lionel's room, one opening into Geraldine's, the other into the hall.

Mrs. Graham took the boy through the latter into the pretty chamber, that looked very dainty and attractive in its drapery of white, relieved only by the tinted walls of a pale pink, and the rose-colored ribbons that knotted back the muslin curtains from the broad, deep windows.

Lionel's eyes wandered around with the same searching, wistful look, saying, almost immediately.

"Where is the lady you told me about?"

Opening the door into Geraldine's room, Mrs. Graham pointed to its motionless and silent occupant, whose only safety consisted in the self-control that taxed her strength to the utmost, saying:

"There she is. She once had a little boy, just about your age, and was so sorry to lose him. Wouldn't it be very nice if you could take his place?"

Lionel drew back from the hand that gently pushed him forward.

"But if she isn't my own mamma how could I? I couldn't love anybody as I did her."

"Well, go and speak to her, dear, while I go down and get your supper ready."

The door closed after the retreating form of the speaker,

and through eyes misty with tears Geraldine looked out from her obscure corner upon the little form that was framed so distinctly in the doorway upon whose threshold the feet still lingered.

"Lionel."

"Mamma!" cried the boy, darting forward.

Then, looking into the face so changed from the one that had smiled down upon him last, he suddenly stopped and burst into tears.

Reaching out her hand, Geraldine drew the boy toward her so that his head rested against her knee.

"Did you think that it was your own mamma speaking to you, my dear boy?" she said, laying her hand softly on his head.

"Yes; you speak just as she used to."

"Does my face look any like hers!"

Lifting his head Lionel again scanned the face that bent over him, a disappointed look coming into his eyes as he did so.

"You make me think of her, somehow, but you don't look like her. My mamma didn't wear a cap. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks red, and she had dimples around her mouth when she smiled. And she always smiled when she spoke to me. My mamma was pretty, *so* pretty!"

"When did you see her last?"

"It's a long time; a good many weeks and months. It was one evening. I said my prayers at her knee, just as I always did. She didn't say anything to me about going away, or bid me good-bye either, but in the morning she was gone. When I cried and asked papa where she was, he looked so white and angry, and said I mustn't never speak her name to him again. And when I kept talking about her, 'cause I couldn't help it, he shook me real hard. Then he seemed sort of sorry, and kissed and cried over me, saying that I was a poor little motherless boy. After breakfast Rattle took me away in a carriage. Papa said that he would come and see me in a few days, but he never come."

Geraldine could not restrain her tears at this artless recital, a big drop falling upon the little hand that she held in both of hers.

This seemed to trouble the sensitive, affectionate-hearted boy.

"What makes you cry?"

Making a successful effort to restrain her emotion, Geraldine smiled through her tears upon the little questioner.

"Because I am so sorry for you, dear child. And then I had a little boy once, and you make me think of him.

Don't you think that you can learn to love me after a time, so that I shall not miss him so much?"

Lionel threw his arms around the speaker's neck.

"I love you now! Only you won't mind if I love my own mamma the best?"

For the first time since their long separation Geraldine held her boy warmly and closely to her heart.

"No, Lionel, I shall always want you to love your own mamma the best."

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. SMITH'S SECRETARY.

When Mrs. Graham went down-stairs she found her husband sitting out on the porch, a favorite place with him at that time of day, in an unusually thoughtful mood.

"What a pretty boy it is, don't you think so, Francis?"

"Yes."

"Such black eyes I never saw in anybody's head."

"Except Mrs. Geraldine's, her eyes are quite as black."

"So they are, I've often remarked it. She told me yesterday that she had lost a little boy about Lionel's age."

"Well, he couldn't have looked much more like her than this one does."

"Goodness me! Francis, what *do* you mean?"

Dr. Graham laughed outright at the open-eyed wonder in the face that was turned toward him.

"Nothing at all, my dear, except that it is a remarkable coincidence to which I casually drew your attention. We, occasionally, see in two strangers a strong resemblance, while those near akin are totally dissimilar. So I place no particular stress upon that.

"Still," continued the doctor, after a thoughtful pause, "I hate mysteries; and must say that I wish that we knew something of the antecedents of the lady who is domiciled beneath our roof, and of whom we know no more than if she had dropped down from the skies."

"Perhaps she did," smiled Mrs. Graham; "people sometimes entertain angels unawares, you know?"

Then, sobering a little as she met her husband's grave look, she added:

"Do you say this, in view of the responsibility we have assumed in relation to Mr. Smith's ward?"

"No. I don't acknowledge that we have assumed any responsibility in regard to him. Mr. Smith knows all we know in relation to Geraldine, being here when she came; and if he chooses to place this confidence in her—I do not say it is misplaced—the responsibility is his, not ours."

Mrs. Graham had the firmest confidence in her husband's

judgment and integrity, having seen it tested in many ways, and a strange fear arose in her heart, that she would have found it hard to put into words, if she had tried.

"My dear Francis, you speak so differently in regard to Geraldine than I ever knew you to do before. Have you seen anything in her of late that makes you distrust her?"

Dr. Graham smiled reassuringly into the troubled face of the speaker.

"On the contrary, I see things in her every day that make me esteem her more highly. Still, as I said before, I hate mysteries. And now let us drop the subject."

"I thought that Mr. Smith's secretary was coming with the boy."

"So he did, as far as the village," responded the doctor. "He told Pat that, as he had some business to do there, he should remain overnight at the hotel, coming up to see the boy early in the morning, before the train leaves."

Bob was sitting in his favorite seat on the steps of the porch, with little Isabel on his knee, whose merry prattle was the sweetest of all music to him.

"I wish that you would take baby up to her mother, Bob," said Mrs. Graham. "I think that I will let her and Lionel have their supper together, so that they will get acquainted. Tell Mrs. Geraldine that I will send Katy up with it directly."

When Bob entered Geraldine's room, which he did in response to the summons that followed his gentle tap at the door, he gazed in wonder and admiration at the lovely boy that was seated on a cushion at her feet, with his head resting against her knee.

He had Isabel in his arms, who looked a little askance at this new claimant for her mother's love.

Smiling upon both, Geraldine held out her arms to the child, who, after a little hesitation, sprung eagerly into them.

"Lionel," said the happy mother, "you have been telling me about your own dear little sister, and how much you loved her. My baby must be several months older, but she has the same name, and I hope you will learn to love her, after a time, almost as well."

Isabel had altered so much during the months that had followed their separation, that no thought entered the boy's mind of her true relationship to him.

All that he saw was a sweet, dimpled face, eyes that looked gleefully into his, rosy lips held up for the kiss that he was nothing loath to give.

Katy now entered with the nicely arranged and appetizing supper, which consisted of bread and milk for Isabel,

to which were added some delicious rice cakes, honey, and some early strawberries.

It was hard to say which enjoyed it the most, the children or she who sat watching them with such a happy, delighted look upon her face, that Mrs. Graham hardly recognized it when she entered the room, as she did, a few minutes later, to see if there was anything further that she could do for the comfort of any of them.

So strong was the constraint that Geraldine was obliged to put upon her feelings, that it was a great relief to her to find herself alone with these dear children, so strangely separated, and still more strangely brought together, now sleeping quietly in the same room, under her loving and watchful care.

Though they both inherited their mother's jetty hair and eyes, there was a good deal of their father's looks in them, especially in Isabel.

Considering the charge that had been brought against her, it will not be wondered at that Geraldine viewed this with no little satisfaction.

It brought vividly to her mind the husband, the memory of whose love and manly worth grew more precious to her day by day, and her eyes grew dim with tears as she gazed.

"If he could look upon his baby now," she thought, "he would know, however foolish and faulty my conduct, that I was guilty of doing him no other wrong. I will atone for my great sin by devoting my life to his children, and it may be that he will some day come to me, as he did in my dream, and putting my baby in my arms, kiss us both, though it be in another and a fairer country than this."

Mr. Smith's secretary kept his word, coming to Riverview the following morning for the purpose of seeing Lionel and learning in regard to his welfare.

Despite her changed appearance, Geraldine felt reluctant to meet strangers, especially from New York, lest it should be some one who would recognize her.

"I suppose I shall have to meet him, sooner or later," she thought, "but I will put it off as long as possible."

So, on the plea of not having fully recovered from the headache of the preceding day, she remained in her own room until after he had left.

Lionel saw him, and came running back to Geraldine as soon as he had gone, his animated look and manner showing that the parting was not the occasion of any heartbreak.

"Were you sorry to have him go?" inquired Geraldine.

"No," was the frank response, "I wasn't sorry, as I know of. He asked me, Mr. Tony did, what he should tell

my guardian, and I said that he was to tell him that I liked you and my new home ever so much."

"I am glad that you were able to send him such good news," smiled Geraldine. "I suppose your guardian comes to see you quite often."

"He never comes."

"Never comes to see you!" repeated Geraldine, in astonishment.

"He came one night, a long time ago, after I had gone to sleep. He came up-stairs to look at me—so Mrs. Roper said—but I didn't see him. I never saw him in my life."

Geraldine was too prudent to let Lionel see the full extent of her wonderment at such strange conduct, especially in the guardian of a child of such tender years.

"Your guardian is very busy, I dare say. He has been out of health, too, I understand. I suppose that he used to write often to ask how you were getting along?"

"Oh, yes; Mrs. Roper got lots of letters. She used to read some of them to me, sometimes, how I must be a good boy, and let him know if I wanted anything He used to send me lots of toys and pretty things when Mr. Tony came, and I was to be sure and let him know if I wanted anything else. I told Mr. Tony to tell my guardian that I wanted to go to my own home and see my mamma, and papa, and little sister."

"And what did Mr. Tony say to that?" inquired Geraldine, as soon as her emotion would allow her to speak.

"He looked very sober, but didn't say much, only that he would tell Mr. Smith what I said. The next time my guardian wrote, he said that he was going to put me in the care of a kind lady, who would love me just as though I was her own little boy. So when Mr. Tony came for me, I thought, perhaps, that it was my mamma he was taking me to."

"You were greatly disappointed when you saw me?"

The boy's ear, quickened by affection, caught the undertone of pain in these words.

Throwing his arms around Geraldine's neck, he cried:

"Yes; but I don't mind it so much now. You seem more and more like my own mamma all the time. And I love you, oh, *so* dearly."

There was one thing that puzzled Geraldine. Mr. Smith's secretary had countersigned his letters by the initial letter "A," which certainly did not stand for the name that Lionel gave him. Still, it might stand for his Christian name.

"Has Mr. Tony any other name than the one you call him by?" she said to Lionel, after turning the matter over in her mind.

"Mrs. Roper called him by some other name, I forget what. It was too hard for me to speak, so he said, and that I was to call him Mr. Tony. I asked him once if that was his real name, and he laughed and said, 'yes.'"

* * * * * *

Mr. Smith was in his library, being seated at a desk on which were various letters and papers demanding his immediate attention, but to which he paid no heed, being absorbed in thought, which the gloom that rested upon his brow showed to be of no very pleasant nature.

Suddenly arousing himself, he glanced at his watch.

"The train was in an hour ago. I wonder what keeps him," he muttered. "They have met by this time. What will the result be? But why should I ask the question? The result will be what I expected. By this time he has forgotten everything. He will not come before to-morrow, and then to tell me—what?"

As though the suspense he was evidently suffering was too intolerable to be borne, the speaker partially arose from his chair.

Then sinking back in it he turned his eyes resolutely upon the papers before him, one of which he began to read, though with an abstracted air, as though his mind took in no sense of its meaning.

A moment later and his privacy was invaded by his secretary, who, entering by a side door near the desk, now stood before his employer with a quiet, deferential air.

Mr. Smith cast a quick, searching glance upon the face, evidently both baffled and surprised by the tranquil look it wore.

"Well, sir?"

The person addressed might have thought the speaker to be displeased at his coming unsummoned into his presence, for he said:

"I understood you to say that you wished to see me immediately on my return?"

"You are right. I did say so. What news do you bring?"

"Well, sir, I followed your instructions in regard to your ward, taking him from Mrs. Roper's to Riverview. I saw him this morning for a few minutes, before the train left, and he seemed quite happy and animated, more as a boy of his age should be than I ever saw him. He said I was to tell you that he liked his new governess very much; that she seemed like his own mamma."

"How did *you* like her?"

"I am sorry to say that I didn't see her. On account of my long illness there, I had some matters to arrange in that vicinity, so I remained at the village hotel over night.

When I called at Riverview the next morning, I inquired for her especially, but Mrs. Graham informed me that she was suffering from a nervous headache, and had not left her room."

"No matter; it is my intention to have you visit my ward every month, so you will soon have an opportunity of seeing her. I shall make it a point that you do see her on your next visit."

The secretary bowed, saying a few minutes later, his face flushing a little as he spoke:

"I found the good farmer and his wife who nursed and cared for me so kindly, they having moved from their former place, being now not far from Riverview. But when I would have recompensed them for their trouble, I found that you had forestalled me."

"You were correctly informed," said the other, a little coldly. "You have been of service to me in various ways, and then those in the circumstances of these people can ill afford to wait. Take these letters and see that the replies to them go out in the next mail."

The concluding sentence making it appear evident that his presence was no longer desired, the secretary gathered up the letters, retreating to a little side room which had been fitted up for his especial use.

It was here that he spent the larger part of the hours devoted to business; a small bell suspended just above his desk, and which communicated with the one in the adjoining room, summoning him into the presence of his chief, whenever he desired to see him.

"What a singular being," thought the secretary, as he seated himself at the desk. "Why he should have sought me out as he did, dealing with me so liberally, is one of the mysteries that I cannot fathom. True, I am of some service to him, but no more than any one else would be in the same position. It can't be from any personal affection, for he has shown none; keeping me at the same distance that he maintained at the first, and which no effort of mine can bridge over. And now see what he has paid out for me, twice what I should have paid, at the most. Well, it is his business; he's rich and can afford it."

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

UNDER the new order of things, inaugurated by the late addition to their number, the household at Riverview moved quietly and happily along.

Happy in the presence and companionship of her two dear children, something of the olden bloom and bright-

ness came back to Geraldine's face, and though nothing approaching to merriment ever dimpled her mouth, a smile often lingered there more sweet and gracious than ever rested there in her palmiest days.

Only one thing cast a shadow on the new-born joys that were springing around her, the memory of the sin that had borne such bitter fruit, and which rested all the more heavily on her heart that she could speak of it to no one.

Many times did she rise softly from her couch, and, after gazing on the sleeping babe, the living image of its father, sink down upon her knees, and, holding the crucifix to her lips, plead with Him who hung thereon to give her soul pardon and peace.

At her own request, Geraldine had two to teach instead of one, her second pupil being good, kind, honest Bob, who, to use his Uncle John's expression, "would rather have a book than his dinner, any day."

Geraldine was not ignorant of the boy's love for what his uncle called "larnin'," nor yet the sacrifice that he was willing to make for the sake of providing a home for her baby-girl, and s he was determined that he should have tne education for which he so thirsted, and of which she was confident that he would make a worthy use.

So she made arrangements with Dr. Graham, who entered heartily into her plans, to have Bob work around sufficient for his board, spending the rest of the time in study.

A happier boy the sun never shone upon when Geraldine unfolded to Bob this arrangement, taking him into the school-room for this purpose, which had been fitted up with books, maps, charts, and everything that could make study pleasant and profitable.

"It is high time that I should begin to be your fairy godmother," smiled Geraldine. as she observed the boy's astonishment and grateful joy, and which had temporarily deprived him of the power of speech.

Then putting Isabel into his arms,she added:

"You were very good to baby and her poor mother, when they were friendless wanderers, having neither friends nor shelter, and both baby and her mother must now be as good as they can be to you. I mean, my dear boy, that you shall have as good an education as you will receive; so everything depends upon yourself, you see."

Mrs. Brown was delighted at the brightening prospects of her nephew, and as for her husband, the capabilities that the boy evinced, no less than the estimation in which he was held by his new friends, had caused quite a revolution in his thoughts and feelings, saying to Geraldine, as

he rather awkwardly expressed his acquiescence in this arrangement for his benefit:

"I never was much of a scholard myself, but Bob allers took as naterly to books as a duck takes to water. Wife allers said that there was somethin' more'n common in the lad, an' I do' know but what she's in the rights on't."

So this important matter was settled to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned.

As Mr. Brown supplied Riverview with eggs, poultry, fruit, etc., he saw his nephew every week, to say nothing of the frequent Sundays that Bob spent at his old home.

Mrs. Brown occasionally accompanied her husband in his trips to Riverview, spending the day there; Bob going back with her in the evening, if the weather was fine, being accompanied by Lionel, who, boy-like, was delighted to get on the water.

These were very enjoyable seasons, not only to Bob, but to Lionel and Isabel, who grew to be very fond of "Auntie Brown," as they called her.

In accordance with the wish that Mr. Smith had expressed through his secretary, Geraldine wrote him every week in regard to the health and general welfare of his ward.

Her knowledge of his peculiarities, together with her fears of betraying too much interest in her pupil, placed her under considerable constraint at first.

But this gradually wore away, until, at last, she began to take absolute pleasure in describing the marked improvement and growing graces of her boy, and who was all the more dear to her that no one recognized her right to call him such.

On one occasion she wrote, "that hearing her little girl call her 'mamma,' Lionel was beginning to give her the same title. Sometimes it was 'my new mamma,' as though to make a distinction between her and the one he had lost. That, as it seemed to afford his ward no little satisfaction, she had encouraged the boy to do this, hoping that it would not be displeasing to him."

Mr. Smith briefly alluded to this in his next letter, expressing his gratification "that his ward regarded her in this light."

Mr. Smith had intimated that his secretary would visit Riverview every month, to inquire personally in regard to the welfare of his ward; but more than two passed and he failed to make his appearance.

One morning Lionel burst into Geraldine's room, his cheeks glowing, and his eyes radiant with excitement.

"Oh! mamma, Mr. Tony is in the parlor! Mrs. Graham is out, and he wants to see you. Just see what he brought

me. A horse and wagon, with a real mane and tail, which can be harnessed and unharnessed! Can I go down into the garden and show it to Bob?

Receiving the required permission, Lionel darted out of the room.

Geraldine paused in front of the mirror to take a cursory glance of the face and form that were fast rounding into all their old grace and contour.

She had discarded the cap, her own beautiful hair, just long enough to fall in jetty waves around the face, giving it an air of youthfulness that was in strong contrast to the gentle gravity of her look and manner.

In order to exclude the rays of the hot July sun, the windows of the parlor had been darkened, so that Geraldine saw only the dim outline of the form that arose on her entrance, but this faint glimpse made her listen with painful intentness to the voice that said:

"I beg pardon for troubling you, madam, but Mr. Smith has made it an especial point that I should see you at my next visit to Riverview. He desires to know——"

Going to the window Geraldine turned the blinds so that the light fell full, not only upon her face, but that of the speaker.

Springing forward, he stared wildly into the pale but beautiful face that confronted him.

"Good heavens! Geraldine—Mrs. Bayard—is it, can it be *you?*"

"Hush! Do not speak that name here! it is no longer mine. Any intimation that it ever has been will not fail to bring upon me a sorrow and trouble that I shudder to contemplate."

"I will say nothing to harm you, Geraldine," said the man, in an agitated manner. "I would a thousand times rather harm myself. You surely ought to know this. But how is it that I find you here in this strange guise and position? Tell me——"

"I can tell you nothing," interrupted Geraldine, shrinking back from the hand that was extended toward her—"at least not now, not here."

At this moment Mrs. Graham's voice was heard in the hall, speaking to one of the servants.

Geraldine continued, still more hurriedly:

"I beseech you to be silent! To give no token that we have ever met before"

Geraldine was standing near the open window, which descended to the floor, stepping through it upon the porch just as Mrs. Graham entered.

That lady paused upon the threshold, glancing around

the room with an air of surprise. Then, advancing, she said:

"I beg pardon, this is Mr. Smith's secretary, I believe? You are very welcome. I thought Mrs. Geraldine was here."

The secretary bowed, showing a self-possession that was remarkable, under the circumstances.

"She was here a moment ago, madam, but the air being a little close, she has stepped out upon the porch."

Acting upon this hint, Mrs. Graham threw up another window, so as to make a circulation of air, remarking, as she did so:

"It is a very close and sultry day, and a thunder-storm would be very welcome and refreshing."

Leaning against one of the pillars of the porch, Geraldine listened, like one in a dream, to the murmur of voices within.

Suddenly she heard the patter of little feet, and then a clear, childish voice, rising above all the others, cried:

"Mamma! Where is mamma?"

These words aroused in the unhappy mother's heart an agony of terror that swept everything before it.

Not daring to trust herself to speak or act in this new and unlooked-for emergency, she fled to her own room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A HARD AND PERPLEXING POSITION.

INTERESTED as Mrs. Graham was in Geraldine, she was very naturally anxious that she should make a favorable impression upon one sustaining such confidential relations to the guardian of her pupil.

So, as soon as her husband entered, and she was able to excuse herself to her guest, she sought Geraldine's room.

She was beginning to take an elder sister's pride in her *protegee's* grace and beauty, the new-born bloom and brightness that was giving to cheek and eye such a wondrous charm; so she was proportionably disappointed as she looked at the pale face that confronted her.

"Dear me! I hope you are not going to have one of your nervous headaches. Mr. Smith's secretary is here, and I am so anxious that you should see and converse with him."

"I did see him just a few moments," responded Geraldine, forcing a smile to her lips as she saw the dismayed look in the speaker's face. "This is nothing; it will pass away in an hour or so."

"Do you really think so?" said Mrs. Graham, her face

brightening; "and that you will be well enough to come down to dinner? It will not be served before two."

"I shall be entirely recovered by that time, probably before. A couple of hours' rest will be all that I shall need."

"Then I won't hinder you from taking it. I wouldn't mind it at any other time. You could remain in your room all day—and it would probably be the best thing you could do, for you are looking quite ill. But you did not see him before, you know, though he expressed a particular desire to meet you, and if you do not now, I'm afraid that Mr. Smith will consider it to be a little odd."

"I shall certainly see him," responded Geraldine, raising her hand to her forehead, which contracted as if with sudden pain. "How long does he intend to stay?"

"He spoke of leaving by the last boat down. Now lie on the lounge, and I will bring you something that Francis gave me once, when I had just such an attack, and which did me a wonderful amount of good."

After darkening the room, and seeing Geraldine's head laid upon the pillow that she placed upon the lounge, Mrs. Graham left the room.

She returned in a few minutes, bearing a wine-glass filled with a clear, ruby liquid, which did not look as if it would be at all hard to take.

"Now drink this. It always drives my headaches away, as if by magic, if it is only taken in time. Don't leave a bit of it."

In obedience to this instruction, Geraldine drained the glass to the last drop.

"You are good to me."

There was something in the beautiful eyes that were lifted to hers that made Mrs. Graham kiss the lips that uttered these words.

"I mean to be very good to you."

"Considering the relation that I sustain to his ward," said Geraldine, speaking with a visible effort, "it is not strange that Mr. Smith should desire his secretary to see me, and I should not think of allowing him to leave without giving him an opportunity to do so. But the condition in which he finds Lionel will be more conclusive evidence as to my fitness or unfitness for the relation I sustain to him than anything I can say. It will be hardly necessary for him to hold much converse with me."

"I don't know about that," was the quick response. "A person occupying the position that he holds, must have more or less influence with his employer, and it is, therefore, of no little importance that you should make a favorable impression upon him, as you are sure to do, if you are

well enough to be yourself. But I mustn't tire you by talking. Try to take a little nap. I will send Katy up when it is time to dress."

"How good, how kind she is!" thought Geraldine, as the door closed softly behind the speaker. "But, ah! it is because she does not know me. Were the dark records of my past life laid open before her, how differently she would regard me! Did she know of the terrible crime that stained so redly these soft, white hands, she would shrink away from me with horror and loathing. What a terrible life to lead, but there is no respite, no help, as I can see. For the sake of my children, whom I have robbed of their natural guardian and protector, I must go on with all these shams and hypocrisies, this seeming to be what I am not. Ah! how true it is that one sin, one deception, inevitably leads to another. Will *he* betray me? I cannot believe that he will meaningly do this, but a chance word, a look even, may do me incalculable mischief."

Mrs. Graham did not fail to interpret aright the inquiring look that her guest gave her as she re-entered the room.

Dr. Graham was present, who had been doing his best to entertain him, with rather indifferent success, as could be seen by the absent look upon the face of his guest, as well as his evident air of relief as his wife entered.

"Mrs. Geraldine has a touch of her old enemy, the headache," said Mrs. Graham, addressing her husband. "But she is better already, and I think will be down to dinner."

The speaker's eyes resting on the face of her guest as she uttered these words, he said, with an air of hesitation and constraint that amounted almost to awkwardness:

"I thought Mrs.—this lady—to be looking rather pale; is not her health ordinarily good?"

"Mrs. Geraldine's severe illness of last winter left her very weak," said Dr. Graham, who felt that he could best speak in relation to this point, "and with a predisposition to attacks of nervous headache, but she has been unusually well of late. In fact, I could see an improvement in her every day."

Here the fear arose in Mrs. Graham's mind lest it might be considered that these attacks would affect Geraldine in the duties she owed to her pupil, and in her zealous friendship, she said:

"Yes, indeed, I think that I never saw any one improve so much in such a short space of time."

"I don't remember of her having one of her nervous headaches since you were here before," added the speaker, turning to her guest. "She had one at the time, as you will remember, and was unable to see you. I have often

noticed that they were generally brought on by some anxiety or excitement."

Mrs. Graham smiled as she saw the startled look in the eyes that were turned inquiringly upon her, hastening to say:

"Mrs. Geraldine has become very much attached to her pupil—as, indeed, we all are; and knowing the object of your visit here, has, naturally, the anxiety that she would have in regard to anything likely to affect, however remotely, her relations to him."

"It is entirely unnecessary, madam, I do assure you. Mr. Smith is quite satisfied with the relation she sustains to his ward, and I have no wish, even if I had the power, to disturb it. I beg that you will assure her that she has nothing to fear from me, in this or any other respect."

Mrs. Graham was not only surprised, but somewhat embarrassed, by the earnestness with which this was spoken, and which was so disproportioned to the occasion.

"I will take great pleasure in doing so," she said, with a smile. "You will have an opportunity of doing this personally, however, which will be more satisfactory, I dare say."

Then, desirous of changing the conversation, she asked some questions concerning his journey, addressing him by the name by which Lionel always called him, and which she supposed to be his.

"It seems that we have made a mistake in regard to the gentleman's name," interposed Dr. Graham; "he informs me that it is not Tony, but Antonelli."

"The mistake is a very natural one," remarked that gentleman, as he met the surprised look in the eyes of his hostess—"indeed, quite unavoidable, under the circumstances. My name being rather long, and difficult to pronounce, I let our little friend call me by the name by which I was called when I was at his age, and which is a contraction of my Christian name. Contrary to my expectation, Lionel politely prefixed Mr. to it, which gave it the appearance of being my true name. Being constitutionally averse to taking any unnecessary trouble, as it seemed to suit him and did no harm to me, I let the matter go."

Mrs. Graham smiled her acceptance of this frankly expressed apology and explanation, her eyes taking a more careful survey of the speaker than they had yet done.

He had the appearance of a man about thirty, with dark hair and eyes, and a form less remarkable for strength than grace and suppleness.

Beneath the constitutional indolence alluded to could be seen a latent fire and passion, which showed that he was

capable, when fully aroused, of strong, if not lasting feeling.

On the whole she felt interested in him.

They were all seated at the table when Geraldine came in, holding Lionel by the hand.

Though Mrs. Graham had intended that the children should eat by themselves that day, she was secretly pleased at the boy's appearance; he looked so neat and pretty in his fresh suit of embroidered linen, and was, withal, thanks to Geraldine's patient and careful tutoring, so quiet and mannerly, that she felt that they could not fail to produce a most favorable impression upon her guest, and which she considered of the first importance.

With this thought uppermost in her mind, she bade the servant bring Lionel's chair, and place it by Geraldine.

But it is doubtful as to whether Antonelli saw the boy, his eyes being fixed upon his beautiful mother with a passionate intensity, which it was well that there was no one present with sufficient leisure to observe.

Geraldine's face, though somewhat pale, was composed.

In their first general sweep around the table, her eyes rested for a moment upon Antonelli, inclining her head almost imperceptibly to his deferential bow.

Then she busied herself in attending to Lionel's wants, and did not look in that direction again.

There being other company at dinner, Mrs. Graham was too much engaged with her duties as hostess to pay much attention to Geraldine, except to observe that she was more silent than usual.

"Mrs. Geraldine is hardly looking herself to-day," she remarked to Antonelli, as they left the dining-room for the parlor; "she is generally very cheerful and companionable. Has not Lionel improved wonderfully since he came here?"

He is looking very finely, indeed," said her companion, abstractedly, who had not the faintest idea as to whether the boy looked well or ill.

Geraldine followed, still holding Lionel's hand, as though she thought that the presence of so much beauty and innocence would shield her from wrong and danger.

Turning round to her, Mrs. Graham now said:

"We were speaking of Lionel, my dear; Mr. Antonelli thinks that he is looking finely."

Those coldly averted eyes turned gratefully upon the person alluded to, a soft and tender smile brooding around the lips that said:

"I am glad to know that Mr. Antonelli will have such a favorable and pleasant report to take back with him."

"I shall, most certainly, have nothing else to report,"

said Antonelli, making an effort to repress the passion that surged up from his heart at these words, but which was clearly perceptible to its object.

A shudder ran through her veins, the transient flush faded from her cheek, and her manner returned to its old coldness and quietude.

Here the advent of several persons into the room made anything but general conversation impossible, to Geraldine's evident relief, who joined, as she was never known to do before, in the gay talk that followed.

In the meantime Antonelli stood moodily apart, his mind distracted by the passionate desire to speak to Geraldine privately, and angered at her evident determination to give him no opportunity to do so.

To this was added the wild fear, that occasionally swept over him, lest he should do or say something that would draw suspicion on them both.

It may be that Geraldine, who knew his hot, impulsive temper, shared this fear, for once she looked toward him, a sad, beseeching expression in her eyes which touched his heart, allaying his anger, but not the impatience that had taken such complete possession of him.

On the plea of not feeling well, which no one could deny that looked at her, Geraldine excused herself early, saying, in reply to Mrs. Graham's remonstrance, "that she would take her tea with the children."

Geraldine felt, rather than saw, the eyes that followed her to the door, toward which she could not, dared not look.

The feeling of relief that she experienced as she found herself in her own room was followed by a disquietude which grew deeper and deeper the longer she reflected upon the position in which she was placed.

It was evident that she must see this man. Even if he were content to do so, it would be a dangerous thing to let him go away without an explanation and understanding.

But how was she to do this?

It could not be effected in the presence of a third party, and there were things in her past life which made her shrink with unconquerable repugnance from anything like a clandestine interview.

Oh! if he would only go away, and leave her to live the life she had marked out for herself, to make the atonement she could make in no other way.

Seeking in various ways to solve this hard problem, Geraldine sat in her favorite seat by the window, with little Isabel in her arms, listening absently, and yet insensibly soothed by her innocent prattle.

Suddenly there came the patter of little feet, and then Lionel burst in, his face full of importance.

"I've got something for you, mamma. Mr. Tony said that I was to let no one see it but you."

As Geraldine's eyes fell on the note that Lionel held out to her, her face flushed with shame and indignation.

Was her innocent child to be the medium of casting further dishonor on his dead father, whose memory had become so dear?

Stung by this thought, Geraldine snatched the note from Lionel's hand, uttering words of sharp reproof, such as she had never spoken to him before.

Overcoming the impulse that came over her to tear the note into fragments, Geraldine opened and read it.

Its contents were brief, and as follows:

GERALDINE,—I can bear this suspense no longer. Your strange conduct, you careful avoidance of me, is driving me to the verge of madness. I ask you, for your own sake, not to push me too far. When I look at you, and think of all we have been to each other, and how we now seem to stand, I am not sure of myself, or what it may lead me to do.

"I *must* and *will* see you, if only for ten minutes, and it must be alone. It is for you to say when and where."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MEETING IN THE SUMMER-HOUSE.

ANTONELLI stood in the lower part of the garden, near the vine-covered summer-house, and in full view of the window by which Geraldine was sitting, taking no heed of the bloom and fragance around him.

He could see the the outlines of her form, the form of the one woman, in all the world, to him, and it stirred to its depths his passionate nature, bringing before him all that she had oncebeen to him, all that he fondly hoped she would be to him again.

The sunset fires were burning redly in the western sky, while no sound broke the stillness of the hour and place, save the gay tones of Mrs. Graham, who was saying a few last words to her departing guests.

Moving up and down the walk with restless, irregular steps, Antonelli strove vainly to still the fierce impatience at his heart, as he watched for the return of his little messenger.

Lionel made his appearance at last, but not with the animated and eager face with which he bounded away; his step was slow and his face sober.

"What made you so long?" was the impatient inquiry. "You gave her the note; what did she say?"

"She was very angry, mamma was," said the boy in a low tone. "She said I mustn't bring her any more letters that nobody was to know about."

"She's very particular all at once!" muttered Antonelli, a bitter sneer curling his lip, which gave his face anything but a pleasant expression. "She defies me, it seems. Let her be careful; love turned to hate is not a pleasant thing to encounter."

Antonelli clinched his hand as he said this, his face darkening with the conflicting passions which struggled for the mastery in his breast.

All this was in full view of Geraldine. She saw Lionel go up and speak to Antonelli, well knowing that he would not fail to repeat the ill-advised words that had fallen from her lips. She saw the angry and passionate gesture that followed, well knowing all that it portended.

Her resolution was quickly taken.

With Isabel still clinging to her neck, she passed down the stairs, out into the garden.

Mrs. Graham was just ahead of her, going apparently in the same direction to where Antonelli was standing, who evidently saw their approach.

A beautiful woman never looks more lovely than when she holds her babe in her arms. And as Antonelli looked at Geraldine, as she stood there before him, invested with the sacredness, the dignity the tender grace of maternity, every resentful feeling was swept from a heart not naturally hard or evil, however impulsive and passionate it might be.

Geraldine experienced a feeling of relief as she saw the softened look in the eyes, saying, before any one else could speak:

"I learned through Lionel, Mr. Antonelli, that you desire a private interview with me before returning to New York, which it is quite natural and right that you should have, under the circumstances."

The calm, clear, steady tone in which Geraldine said this was a marvel to herself.

Mrs. Graham had been secretly vexed at Geraldine's reserve, and apparent avoidance of one whose good opinion she was so anxious that she should gain, so the first feeling of surprise was followed by one of pleasure.

Turning to Isabel, she said:

"Come with auntie, darling, and let us go and find Bob."

In anticipation of the frolic that was sure to follow this,

the child uttered a crow of delight, springing into the arms that were held out to her.

Geraldine watched Mrs. Graham as she moved toward the house, holding Lionel by the hand, until she disappeared from view, and then, as if in mute recognition of his claim to a private interview, went into the summer-house by which they were standing, Antonelli following her.

The human heart is a strange, unreasoning thing. Antonelli had gained the boon for which he had so earnestly sought, but that which lay back of it—as he fondly believed—seemed further away from him that ever.

He had imagined all that he would say to the idol of his heart, were the opportunity given him—the eloquent and passionate words he would utter, not one of which he could recall now.

There was something in the gentle dignity of Geraldine's bearing, the open, straight-forward course she had taken, which chilled him, he hardly knew why.

He would have been far better pleased if she had stolen out of the house at midnight to see him, as she did before, clinging to him in her passionate despair and sorrow, even though it might only be to bid him an eternal farewell.

Contrary to what might have been expected, Geraldine was the first to break the constrained and rather awkward silence that followed.

"No doubt you wonder why the sight of you should be such a shock to me, Antonio. I had been led to believe that you were killed—murdered."

"And so I was—or nearly so; it was only by a hair's breadth that my life was saved."

Geraldine shuddered.

"God has been very good to us both. If you had died, in His eyes I should be your murderess."

Antonelli started back, looking at Geraldine as though he thought she was bereft of her senses.

Reassured by the steady, mournful gaze that he encountered, he said:

"*You* my murderess? Why do you say that, Geraldine?"

"Because it is the truth. Because it was my folly, if not actual guilt, that drove my husband to the madness and despair that alone could make such a thing possible."

Antonelli's face darkened.

"So it was he? I thought so at the time; but it was a back-handed thrust, and so dark that I could not see. Not that I should have known him, as I never saw him, to my knowledge."

In the silence that followed, Antonelli cast a look of

tender reproach upon his companion's partially averted face.

"You say that you were surprised to see me, Geraldine; were you not glad, also?"

"How could I help being glad to know that the father of my dear babes has not such a stain upon his hand as this?"

"You think only of him!" exclaimed Antonelli, bitterly, "you care nothing for me."

"I am glad for your sake, also," said Geraldine, with the gentle coldness that was more irritating to her companion than scorn or defiance; "glad, very glad to know that you are not only alive, but happy and prosperous. I should like to know more about yourself, especially how you came to be the private secretary of Lionel's guardian?"

"I know no more about that than you do," responded Antonelli, with the shrug of the shoulder that Geraldine so well remembered. "He heard of me a few weeks after I was wounded—through Dr. Graham, I think, coming to see me at the farmer's house to which I was taken. When I got well, he took me into his employ. I can't tell you why he did that either."

There was something in the tone in which this was spoken, the absence of the gratitude that might be expected under the circumstances named, which struck strangely upon Geraldine's ear.

"He did it from pure kindness of heart, I presume. What else could it be? Mrs. Graham tells me that he has the kindest of hearts, and I am sure that he has proved it by his treatment of me. You should be very grateful to him, Antonio."

Antonelli responded to this reproachful tone with another shrug of the shoulder.

"So I am, so far as his nature and mine will allow. Mr. Smith has been kind to me, there's no denying that—unaccountably so, in some ways—but it always seemed to me that it was from some freak. He is, certainly, the oddest man alive. Notwithstanding the position I hold, and which brings me into such confidential relations with him, I am no better acquainted with him now than I was the first day I saw him. The thought has often struck me, that he endured, rather than cared for, my presence. However, I suppose that would be his way toward any one. But tell me about yourself, Geraldine. How is it that you are here in this strange guise, away from your home and husband?"

"I have no home and no husband."

An exultant flash broke from Antonelli's eyes.

"Is your husband dead? Then you are free, Geraldine!"

Geraldine drew back from that outstretched hand.

"My husband is dead, but his death has not freed me; on the contrary, it has bound me more strongly than before."

"You—you talk very strangely, Geraldine," faltered Antonelli, gazing almost in awe at the speaker, whose face wore a look that he had never seen there before.

"Do I? I have passed through strange experiences, have endured terrible sufferings. And what is more bitter than anything else, I have the consciousness that all that I have suffered, all that others have suffered, has been the outgrowth of my own folly. For the sake of my children, I can say no more—save that I am widowed, they rendered fatherless, and by my own hand.

"I cannot tell you how this is," continued Geraldine, as Antonelli, with a gesture of astonishment and incredulity, was about to speak. "I can say little more. I cannot, prudently, linger here; nor can I at this, or any other time, enter into particulars. I can only tell you that my husband's death threw me into the power of my brothers, who treated me most cruelly. I escaped from them, and they consider me dead. Not only my own safety, but what is far dearer to me, the guardianship of my boy, depends upon their continuing to think so."

Antonelli was touched by that appealing look.

"You, surely, cannot think that I would betray you, Geraldine, or do anything to cause you any fresh sorrow?"

"No; I do not think you would. I should be sorry to think so."

Geraldine stepped out of the summer-house as she said this.

Springing forward, Antonelli cried:

"Surely this is not all? I shall see you again?"

"Certainly; the relation you sustain to Lionel's guardian makes that a matter of course."

Antonelli watched Geraldine as she moved up toward the house.

"How changed she is!" he thought, "how cold and indifferent. But she loved me once, I know, and she shall again!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. SMITH'S ADVICE AND OPINION.

ANTONELLI'S long and late conference with Geraldine prevented the carrying out of his purpose to leave by the last boat, for which, perhaps, he was not sorry, as it gave him an opportunity to see Geraldine again, though only in the presence of others, and to hold some conversation with her, though as to the merest commonplaces.

Fortunately for the latter, in carrying out her purpose, the house was full of company, friends from the city, who usually visited Riverview at that season of the year, and which enabled Geraldine to avoid the slightest approach to anything like private conversation, and without appearing to do so.

There was a new-born grace and beauty about Geraldine which her former lover had never seen there before, which came from within rather than from without, finding a natural outlet and expression in the external loveliness with which she was so richly endowed. And however incapable Antonelli might be of comprehending or appreciating this, he felt its charm.

He was not a man capable of enduring affection, especially in the prolonged absence of its object; and might have thought the love, for which he nearly paid the forfeit of his life, to be costing him too dear.

But however this might be, his first glance at Geraldine had swept all prudential considerations away; at the first sound of her voice, all the passionate love of his ardent nature had come back to him, and which was intensified by the strange, intangible barrier that had sprung up between them.

So, impelled by a fascination that he was unable to resist, he lingered until after dinner, glad, if not content, to be within the sound of her voice, and to watch her at a distance.

But, though able to keep guard over his tongue, his eyes were not so easily governed.

Even Mrs. Graham noticed the intensity of his gaze.

Not having the slightest idea of the true state of things, or that the two had ever met before, she ventured upon a sly allusion to it to Geraldine, whom she met in the hall after dinner, on her way to the school-room.

But it was something that she never repeated; the pained look in Geraldine's eyes, the few disjointed words that fell from her lips, showing how distasteful to her this allusion, and all that it implied was.

Antonelli, who was to leave in the course of half an hour, was not long in missing Geraldine, and conjecturing whither she had gone, followed her; Mrs. Graham having taken him there the day before, he experienced no difficulty in finding his way.

He found Geraldine's two pupils there, Bob and Lionel, the latter leaning his head against his mother's knee, the former so absorbed in the book that was lying open upon the desk before him, that he only glanced up as Antonelli entered.

Now Antonelli did not mind Lionel, though he would

have preferred his absence, but Bob was not a little in his way.

Addressing Geraldine, he said:

"I have come to take leave of you, madam."

"Would you mind, my good lad," he added, turning to Bob, "stepping down-stairs to see if the carriage is come?"

Bob arose, giving Geraldine a questioning look as he did so, who was fully equal to the emergency.

"My dear boy," she said, addressing Lionel, "Robert is very busy at his lessons, will you run down and see if the carriage is at the door? Come directly back."

Then, without appearing to notice the smothered annoyance and irritation in Antonelli's countenance at being thus "headed off," she turned to that individual, saying:

"You will have a delightful day for your journey. Please convey my thanks to Mr. Smith for the confidence that he reposes in me, and of which I will endeavor to prove myself worthy. Mrs. Graham and myself have hoped that he would visit Riverview some time in the course of the summer."

Antonelli's irritation subsided somewhat beneath the influence of the smile that accompanied these words.

"I cannot say as to that. Mr. Smith seems to be considerable of a recluse. I will tell him what you say. I shall come."

While Antonelli was speaking Lionel came running back with the announcement that the carriage was waiting; and uttering the last sentence with a meaning look and tone that Geraldine did not fail to understand, the speaker bowed and departed.

Geraldine listened with a feeling of relief to the sound of the carriage wheels as it moved away from the door.

What she had so greatly feared was deferred, at least. But she knew the nature of the man too well not to know that it was only deferred; that he would not only "come," as he had said, but that it would be impossible for her not to see him, no matter how distasteful the hopes that she could not but see that he cherished.

And she had once loved this man, or thought she did, toward whom she now felt so strong a repugnance, that if it had not been for Lionel and the separation it would involve, she would have taken her babe and fled to where there would be no possibility of her meeting him again.

And this man loved her; there was no seeming in this, it was instinct in every look that he gave her.

It seemed like an additional wrong to the husband, to whose memory she had so solemnly vowed to be true, to harbor such thoughts, but so it was.

How could she convince him that he could more easily kindle to life cold, dead ashes, than awaken any response to it in her heart? And if she did, would it not arouse a resentment that would prove disastrous to all her hopes?

But all this was in the future. She knew the straight path that lay before her, and in which she must walk, to whatever it might lead.

In her temporary madness, she had separated herself from her husband in this life, had, voluntarily, made herself his widow, and his widow she would remain, devoting herself entirely to his children.

She knew the struggle that must sooner or later ensue; but whether it brought victory or defeat, her course, so far as she was left in freedom, must be the same.

At the worst she could throw herself upon the mercy and compassion of the eccentric but kind-hearted man who was Lionel's guardian, why, she did not know, nor was it a matter that could safely be inquired into.

If Antonelli's eager passion turned to open enmity, as is so often the case with men of his stamp and temperament, when it fails to meet any response from its object, she would tell Mr. Smith as much of her sorrowful history as she dared to reveal to any one.

And though her hopes in regard to any favorable result were far less strong than her fears, she felt that it would be the least painful of the two alternatives.

In the meantime, Antonelli took his way back to the city, his mind a perfect maze of conflicting hopes, fears and conjectures.

Beneath his elation at the unexpected discovery he had made, were the mortification and disappointment at the rebuff he had had from a quarter where he had least thought to receive it, and which wounded his vanity quite as much as his love.

From this he fell to pondering on the relation that his employer sustained to Geraldine's boy.

He had known, in a casual way, that she had children, and that Lionel had the same name, but being more accustomed to Geraldine's maiden than married name, it had made little impression upon him, while the supposition that Mr. Smith's ward was an orphan precluded any suspicion of the true state of things.

But he was not sorry for the hold that this gave him on the woman he loved, and who had once loved him. Not that he intended to use it hardly; on the contrary, he meant to be very gentle and forbearing in its exercise; to be her friend and protector in the strange position in which she was placed, at least so far as she would let him.

Still power is sweet, and that which he had over Geral-

dine would afford him numerous advantages in re-winning her affections, as he had fully determined to do.

It would give him the privilege of seeing her often, establishing confidential relations between them, and then she could not help feeling grateful to him for his silence and aid.

Antonelli's mind was so completely absorbed by these thoughts that the idea as to how his employer might view his prolonged absence never occurred to him until he reached the house.

Being informed by one of the servants that Mr. Smith had inquired for him several times, he proceeded immediately to the library, having no very clear idea as to how he was to explain his conduct, or of anything, in fact, except his determination to keep what he had discovered to himself, at least for the present.

Mr. Smith turned himself squarely around, on his entrance.

"Well, sir?"

Antonelli looked slightly confused at that penetrating and questioning look.

"No doubt you are surprised at my long absence, sir, and which was entirely unforeseen when I left, as well as impossible to avoid, under the circumstances."

"You are right; I *am* surprised. What has happened?"

Antonelli's face took a still deeper flush.

"Nothing, sir. That is to say, nothing that I could well help. I missed the boat yesterday afternoon, and this morning——"

If Mr. Smith did not enjoy his secretary's embarrassment, he certainly was in no way inclined to help him out of it.

"Well, sir, there have been two trains and another boat since then. What happened this morning?"

Whatever Antonelli's fault might be, either of education or temperament, it was not an easy thing to him to stoop to absolute falsehood.

"I don't deny but what something has happened of some moment to me perhaps, but which can be——"

"Of no concern to me," said Mr. Smith, filling up the pause which followed.

"Which can be of no particular interest to you," continued Antonelli, smiling at this fresh proof of what he considered his patron's oddity.

"Perhaps I might be left to judge of that," said Mr. Smith, dryly. "But I have no wish to force your confidence. In the meantime I should be glad to have your report concerning the mission I intrusted to you, and in

regard to which I may be allowed to take some interest. How did you find my ward?"

"Quite well and very happy."

"You saw his governess?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your opinion of her?"

"What everybody's must be that sees her, that she is a most lovely and attractive woman."

"Considering your long stay at Riverview, her attractiveness—to you, at least—is beyond all dispute. I referred, however, to her fitness as governess to my ward?"

"I beg pardon, sir," responded Antonelli, coloring. "My opportunities for judging as to this have been limited, as you know, but so far as I have seen, I do not think you could have made a better choice."

"I will see that you have all the opportunity in future that your desire.

"Mind, I don't send you to Riverview to make love to my ward's governess," continued Mr. Smith, as he observed the sparkle to his companion's suddenly lowered eyes. "Still, if mutually agreeable, I don't know why I should object; provided, of course, neither of you neglect the duties that you owe me.

"Now you will oblige me by attending to these accounts and making a clean copy of some papers that you will find on your desk."

Antonelli retreated to his own room in the best possible spirits.

The unexpected manner in which Mr. Smith played into his hands was a source of surprise as well as pleasure.

"He certainly is the oddest man alive," he thought. "One would almost think that he sent me there purposely. If I can retain my secretaryship, and Geraldine continues to have the care of Lionel, as she will, of course, desire to do, our united salary will be all that we shall require."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WOOING.

THE longer that Antonelli pondered on the interest that his wealthy patron had manifested, not only in himself but Geraldine, the more he was convinced that he would not be ill-pleased at the marriage of his two *proteges*, a conclusion that gave him no little satisfaction, as the reader will infer.

He recalled Mr. Smith's evident dissatisfaction at not seeing Geraldine on his first visit to Riverview, the efforts he had made to throw them together, the hints and allusions, all of which pointed the same way.

"She being all alone in the world, he doubtless considers that it would be a good thing for her," he mused, "and that I would be better off married. He must think that I have very little common sense, however"—here the lip curled a little—"to marry a woman of whose antecedents I know, as he supposes, so little. But men in love have done quite as foolish things as this; so I will not quarrel with the good fortune that I believe is in store for me, if I am brave enough to make a right use of the opportunities that are now mine."

With these views and considerations, Antonelli received, with evident satisfaction, Mr. Smith's announcement of his intention of sending him again to Riverview, and which was made in less than two weeks from the date of his last visit.

Being naturally disposed to think highly of himself, no serious doubt entered Antonelli's mind as to his ultimate success in re-winning Geraldine's love—her husband's death was too recent, the circumstances under which they had parted too painful for her to take kindly to his advances now, but all this would pass away.

With few fears on this score Antonelli's thoughts took quite another direction as he neared his destination, centering upon the mystery that enveloped Geraldine, and which he was unable to fathom, the dark cloud that rested on her, and which was likely to affect him in the relation he was so sure of sustaining to her.

He knew that her husband had been a very wealthy man; how was it that this boy inherited all, and his widow nothing?

He paid very little heed to Geraldine's wild accusations in regard to her husband, and which he believed to be the imaginings of a morbid conscience, rendered additionally sensitive by her husband's death following so soon his jealous outburst against her.

Why, she had declared that she had considered herself *his* murderer, which was preposterous, there being probably as much foundation to one as the other.

But the other matter was a different thing; it behooved him to lose no time in looking after his interests as well as hers, for her interests were his; also, the time was approaching when she must and would acknowledge it to be so.

It being a pleasant day, Antonelli walked up from the station, finding Mrs. Graham and Geraldine in the sitting-room, whose open doors and windows brought him very clearly into view as he stepped upon the porch.

As he had given no notice of his coming, it was "a pleas-

ant surprise," to use Mrs. Graham's words as she came forward to receive him.

If there was any surprise in Geraldine's face, Antonelli looked vainly for any reflection of the pleasure that sparkled in his own eyes as he greeted her.

"You did not expect to see me again so soon?"

"No."

"But I am welcome, nevertheless?" responded Antonelli, with the winning smile that Geraldine had once found so irresistible, but which now recalled so many painful recollections that her tone and manner were still more chilling as she said:

"Mrs. Graham has already assured you of this, whose welcome to Riverview is of more importance than mine."

"But not to me, not to *me!*" said Antonelli in an eager whisper, which only reached the ear for which it was intended.

At this moment Dr. Graham entered, and taking advantage of the greetings which followed, Geraldine slipped out of the room, nor did Antonelli see her again until the next morning.

He no longer took any pains to conceal his interest in her from his host and hostess; he was greatly encouraged in this course by Mrs. Graham's evident sympathy with him and desire for his success—her husband being more practical, not being disposed to commit himself either way.

"It would be just the best thing in the world for Geraldine, don't you think so, Francis?" said Mrs. Graham in one of their private conferences.

"That depends. It might be the very worst."

"I don't see how you can say that, when he is so devoted, and would make her such a kind husband, just exactly what she needs."

"But supposing she has a husband somewhere?"

"Oh, Francis, I don't think that. She as good as told me she was a widow."

"We know very little about her anyway, far too little to be able to judge in a matter of so much importance. I suppose that Mr. Antonelli is aware how and in what way she came to us?"

"Oh, yes; I've told him over and over again. He asks me so many questions, and seems so interested in all that concerns her."

"He is more interested in her than she is in him, I should say."

"True. I sometimes think she almost dislikes him. I don't see why. He is very handsome and agreeable. Don't you think so?"

"He is certainly handsome after a certain style, and

appears to have the manners and instincts of a gentleman. Most ladies would consider him very agreeable, I dare say."

"I really wish you would speak out, Francis," said Mrs. Graham, a little pettishly, "and if you dislike the man, say so."

"But I don't, my dear. Why should I? He seems to me like a man of no great depth or strength of character, one who would be shaped very much, either for good or evil, by his feelings and surroundings. Still, I may do him injustice in this respect. It does not speak very highly, however, for his good sense, that he should be so ready to fall in love with a woman of whom he not only knows nothing, but to whom his attentions are so distasteful. But people are not noted, I believe, for having a superabundance of that article when under the dominion of what is termed the tender passion. I don't think that I was myself, and though I am fain to confess that I drew a prize in the lottery, where there are said to be so many blanks, I'm afraid that it was more by good luck than any wit or wisdom of mine. I am sorry to pour cold water on your benevolent design of enabling Geraldine to make this young man as happy as you have made me, but I think we had both better remain neutral in this case, giving neither let nor hinderance to either party."

Like most women happily married and of a benevolent turn of mind, Mrs. Graham, if not a match-maker in the true sense of the word, was fond of helping along any affair of the sort that happened to be in progress; but she had a good deal of respect for her husband's judgment, and so contented herself, with something of an effort, it must be confessed, to being merely an eye witness to the little drama that was being enacted beneath her roof.

Geraldine played her part in this—if a part it was—with no little skill and prudence.

During the two days that Antonelli remained at Riverview he never lost an opportunity of conversing with Geraldine, and without appearing to avoid him or treating him with any apparent discourtesy, she never saw him except in the presence of a third party.

Determined to rewin Geraldine's affections, he bore this with all the patience he could muster, but he chafed inwardly under the restriction that it laid upon him, his dissatisfaction sometimes being visible in his countenance.

Whenever Geraldine was down stairs she kept as close as possible to Mrs. Graham, who, influenced by her husband's caution, and perhaps by Geraldine's evident unwillingness to be left alone, paid no heed to the appealing looks and hints of her guest.

If Antonelli went into the school-room, as he occasionally

did, hoping to have an opportunity for a little private talk, he invariably found Bob there.

At last, he began to entertain a feeling of personal dislike to the lad, whose boyish devotion to Geraldine was a source of annoyance and inconvenience, and who, whether wittingly or unwittingly, was such a valuable auxiliary to her in the desperate effort she was making to defer, at least, the issue that she well knew must sooner or later be met, whatever it might bring.

It was the last day of Antonelli's stay at Riverview, and he was obliged to confess, to his visible chagrin and mortification, that he was no nearer to the goal of his hopes than when he came.

Determined that he would not leave without a thorough understanding, he resolved to cut, with one bold stroke, the knot that he had vainly endeavored to untie.

He had been watching Geraldine for the space of ten minutes or more, who was seated at the further end of the room, in company with Mrs. Graham, Lionel, and Isabel, the latter playing at her feet.

Never had she looked so lovely, or seemed so far away from him as now.

Walking up to her, he said:

"I leave in a few hours for New York, and have something to say to you before I go. Will you take a walk with me down by the river?"

Geraldine's only response to this was to tie on the hat that was lying on the lounge.

Mrs. Graham looked at her a little curiously as she did so.

There was no conscious flush to the cheek; on the contrary, it was a shade paler, while there was that hunted look in her eyes seen in those of certain animals, whose only safety is in flight, and who see every way of escape closed to them.

But, however puzzled Mrs. Graham might be to account for the expression on Geraldine's face, she was at no loss to understand the look in Antonelli's eyes as they rested upon it.

"He means to speak to her," she thought.

Then going to the window, she watched the two as they moved down the winding path that led to the river.

"What a handsome-looking couple," was her inward reflection. It's easy to see that he worships the very ground she walks on, but she don't act as if she cared two straws for him."

Here Mrs. Graham shook her head, with an air of regret that had in it something of disapproval.

They had been gone nearly two hours, and some surprise

began to mingle with her anxiety for their appearance, when she saw Geraldine coming up the path alone.

"Dear me!" was her involuntary exclamation as soon as she entered the door. "What have you done with Mr. Antonelli?"

"Nothing," responded Geraldine, the faint smile that came to her lip giving her face a strange expression, so out of keeping was it with the disturbed look it wore. "He wanted to take the next train, and having only just time to do so, commissioned me to give his adieus and apologies."

"She has refused him," thought Mrs. Graham, as she listened to Geraldine's retreating footsteps as she ascended the stairs to her own room. "But he doesn't look to me like a man that would be easily discouraged in an affair of this kind, and I've known women to refuse men more than once, and marry them after all."

As Geraldine looked upon Lionel, who came bounding to meet her, a yearning desire came over her to take him and Isabel and flee.

But this was quickly repressed by the thought of the injury it would do to the boy's future prospects.

"By my own folly I have forfeited a mother's claims to him," she thought; "if the sorrow that I so greatly fear must come, I will meet it bravely, and here."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MR. SMITH'S COUNSEL.

ANTONELLI returned to his duties in a very strange and unequal frame of mind.

Wounded in his vanity as well as heart, there were times when he was on the point of telling Mr. Smith of the relation that Geraldine sustained to his ward, and then a feeling of pity for the woman whose love—now a thing of the past—had cost her so dear, deterred him.

At the early part of their acquaintance, while he was still suffering from the effect of the wound that had nearly caused his death, he had made, in some degree, a confidant of his employer in regard to the circumstances that preceded it, of course suppressing all names.

Would it tend to his advantage to make a still further revelation?

At all events, he would make some inquiries concerning his knowledge of Lionel's father.

Since his discovery of Geraldine, it had often been on his mind to do this, but Mr. Smith was not a man that it was easy to question.

His inquiries concerning his ward, soon after his return

from Riverview, opened the door to this, and he strode boldly in.

"I beg pardon, but I think you told me that Master Lionel's father was an old friend of yours?"

"I told you that he was an old acquaintance; it's hard telling who are our friends. I knew my ward's father when we were boys—in fact, ever since I can remember."

"You knew his mother, too, I suppose?"

"I never knew his mother at all."

"Is she dead?"

"Yes."

There was a momentary pause, which Mr. Smith broke by saying:

"I repeat it; while I was as intimately acquainted with my ward's father as any man well could be, his mother I never knew. I confess that there is a mystery connected with her loss, which must remain such as far as I am concerned."

A little uneasy at the turn the conversation was taking, Antonelli hastened to say:

"I have no wish to pry into it, believe me."

Mr. Smith looked attentively at the speaker.

"You seem to be in the mood for asking questions. Doubtless the interest you evince in Lionel springs from the still deeper one that you take in his charming governess?"

Antonelli colored.

"It has a good deal to do with it, I acknowledge."

Then a few moments after:

"Mr. Smith, I believe that you take an interest in me. Why you should do so I don't know, except it is from pure goodness of heart."

"I certainly do take an interest in you, Mr. Antonelli, though I cannot say that it springs from any goodness of heart."

"I believe, also, that if I was in any difficulty, you would help me out of it, if you could?"

Mr. Smith took such a long time to reply that the speaker looked a little anxiously at those grave, but kindly eyes.

"You may count on that, too. Though in order that I may do this, it is necessary that you should be frank with me."

"That is what I mean to do, as far as I can be. Do you remember my telling you that I was betrothed to a lady who was induced to marry another man, under the supposition that I was dead?"

"I remember you telling me something of the kind, in

explaining the wound you received, and which you supposed came from the hand of her husband."

"I did not see the man who stabbed me, still I had every reason to suppose it to be so; now I know it. Not that I blame him any; I should probably have done the same thing, had I believed as he did. Now that he is dead, I am willing to believe that he may have been quite as much wronged in the matter as I was."

"You can hardly look upon his death in the light of a misfortune, though?"

"I cannot say that it has brought me any good fortune as yet. I have made a strange discovery lately. I can mention no names, but this man's wife, or widow rather, the woman that I love, whom I love now more madly than ever, is your ward's governess."

Drawing his own inference from the silence that followed this announcement, Antonelli continued:

"I do not wonder that you are surprised, sir. You can judge something of what my feelings must have been at this discovery."

"Joy must have been largely in excess of surprise, I should say. As to this lady, how glad she must have been to find you living!"

"She was glad, certainly," said Antonelli, a tinge of bitterness in his tone that he made no effort to repress; "but it was less, I believe, to find me living than to learn that her husband's hand was not stained with blood."

Mr. Smith turned his partly-averted face toward the speaker.

"Are you sure of that?"

"I have had the repeated assurance of it from her own lips."

"If she is a mother, that is very natural. However that may be, your course is plain. You were not only pledged to each other before she met her husband, but, by your own confession, you have been instrumental in bringing upon her a great deal of trouble. And now that she is not only free, but all alone in the world, she has the best of all claims to your love and protection."

"God knows how willingly I would give them to her if she would let me. Never was she half so lovely, half so dear to me as now. Her coldness, her careful avoidance of me, almost drives me wild!"

"Do you mean to say that she refuses your love?"

"I mean to say that all my efforts to re-establish our former relations have been without the slightest avail. She seems to view with horror the least allusion to them."

"That is very strange. How do you account for it?"

"I can't account for it. She acknowledges the love that

she once had for me, but says that the death of her husband killed it."

"One would suppose that it would have the contrary effect, seeing that it leaves her free."

"One *would* suppose so," said Antonelli, gloomily. "But who can fathom the ways of woman, or say what she will or won't do?"

"You consider her fickle, then; that her strange conduct is due to want of stability of character?"

"No, sir, I don't; I can't say that. I never thought her fickle, and she seems to have more stability of character than before. It looks more like some radical change in her; and that is the discouraging part of it."

"I think you are too easily discouraged. I have no right to inquire into what she evidently wishes to keep concealed, but it is clear, from her friendless and lonely position, that she has passed through a great deal of sorrow. It would not be at all strange, especially taking into consideration her long and serious illness, if it resulted in a somewhat morbid and unhealthy state of mind, and which will pass away after a time."

"I've thought of that, sir," said Antonelli, his face brightening a little. "She talks so wildly at times that it seems as if her mind couldn't be altogether right; accusing herself of what, in the very nature of things, it is impossible she should be guilty of. Why, it will surprise you to learn that she even goes so far as to accuse herself of being instrumental to her husband's death!"

Mr. Smith's face did not express the surprise that the speaker evidently expected, but then it rarely indicated emotion of any kind.

"I have seen too much of the dark side to human nature to be easily surprised," he said, after a moment's thought. "History teaches us that women, with hands as soft and white as hers, have done terrible things."

"Oh! but if you knew Geraldine you would not could not think such a terrible thing as that! She has as gentle and tender a heart as ever beat."

As Mr. Smith looked upon the speaker, the grave, almost stern face softened to as near an approach to a smile as ever rested there.

"She has a warm advocate in you, I see. It is, at least, safe to suppose that you know her heart better than any one."

Antonelli's face gloomed.

"I used to think so; but she has shut me out of her heart now."

"Oh! that is only for a time; you will win your way back again."

"I wish it might be so. However that may be, I should be sorry to give you any cause to think ill of her."

"You have given me no reason to think ill of her. Nor do I think that you will ever regret having confided in me."

"I have my own theory in regard to her wild and strange accusations in regard to the death of her husband."

"What is it?"

"When I first heard of her marriage, and the treachery that had been practiced against us both, I wrote her—I hardly know what, I was nearly wild with grief and despair. She was as nearly frantic as I, replying by a letter full of affection for me and detestation of her husband, whom she considered at the time to be a party to the plot to separate us. This letter being about me when I was stabbed, unfortunately fell into her husband's hands. Whatever this man's faults might have been—I suppose he had faults, like all the rest of us—he was passionately attached to his wife, and the reading of it must have been a great shock to him. It is hardly to be credited, however, that it was sufficient to cause his death; but it following soon after, his wife must have thought so, bringing the remorseful sorrow that makes her consider herself his murderer. Doesn't it look to you as if it might be so?"

Antonelli was so intent upon building up his theory, that he moved a step nearer to the desk at which Mr. Smith was sitting, and upon whose face his eyes now turned for sympathy and encouragement.

"It looks very much as if it might be so. There are things that kill quite as effectually as poison or the dagger."

Antonelli looked puzzled and disappointed.

"But I don't say that he was killed at all; only that she might think so. He might have died, anyway."

"True enough. But he *is* dead, it seems, which is the most important thing—to you. His widow is young and beautiful. She will, doubtless, marry again; and why not you as well as another?"

"Then you counsel me to persevere?"

"I don't counsel the persecution of any woman. In a matter that concerns her own happiness so largely, she ought to be left entirely free. By your own showing, the fact that she was not left free has been fruitful of sorrow, and not to her only. Still I would not act hastily in the matter. For her sake, as well as your own, I would make sure that she thoroughly understands herself; that her refusal to become your wife does not spring from any morbid desire to make atonement to the dead, and which she will be very likely to regret when her mind is in a more

healthy condition. If she *is* acting freely, only one course is open to you; but it looks very much to me as if she was refusing you from a mistaken sense of duty."

The eager sparkle in Antonelli's eyes showed that renewed hope was springing up in his heart.

"What you say sounds very reasonable, sir; but as she absolutely refuses to have any further talk with me on the subject, I don't see how I am to ascertain this. What would you do if you were in my place?"

"I would write her a plain, dispassionate letter, asking her to reply to you in the same way. I would set before her clearly my love and my claims, stating that if her feelings are so entirely altered as she says, that you will annoy her no further; but if she really does love you, as you are fain to hope is the case, that she has no right to make the living wretched for the sake of some real or fancied wrong to the dead, and who would probably be the last to ask or desire any such sacrifice of her. It is impossible for me to say what I should do if I were in your place, but this is the course I think I should take."

"I will write her this very day."

Mr. Smith now directed his attention to the papers on his desk, and taking this as the signal for his dismissal, Antonelli made a movement to withdraw, when he was arrested by these words:

"One thing more. You say that this man believed his wife to be faithless to him. Had this any foundation in fact? You need not answer unless you choose."

"Not the slightest. Considering her marriage as no marriage I urged her to flee with me, but she would not. Several letters passed between us, but she granted me only three interviews, the last one being to tell me that we must never meet again. I trust, sir, in justice to this most unfortunate lady, that you will believe me when I tell you this."

The thought of how Mr. Smith's judgment of her might affect Geraldine, especially as to her boy, gave a good deal of earnestness and feeling to Antonelli's tone and manner as he uttered these words.

Mr. Smith was evidently touched; there being an unwonted light in his eyes as he said:

"I not only believe, but thank you. That is all."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE NEW GIRL.

MRS. GRAHAM entered the school-room all equipped for one of the long rides that she was so fond of taking.

"I am going up to Haven Rock, and shall not be back

before tea. I leave you and Bob to keep house. The new girl is coming on the next train. I wish you would see that Pat doesn't forget to meet her. I told him about it, but I suppose he'll forget it, if he can. And be sure and go to the post-office. I do hope that this one will be better than the last. She can't be much worse, that's certain. She comes well recommended from one of the doctor's old patients, whose family is going to Europe. If she is all he says she is, she'll be sure to get home-sick and want to go back to the city. That is my experience with all that are worth keeping."

The difficulty of getting steady, reliable help was a standing grievance with Mrs. Graham, occasioning her, as is often the case in such matters, genuine pleasure to dilate upon.

Geraldine raised her eyes from the lesson that she was explaining to Bob, who was looking over her shoulder, knowing the speaker too well to consider it necessary to do more than smile an assent to all this.

As soon as the lessons were over, she sent Bob to remind Pat, the hired man, to go to the station, but found that he had already gone.

Ever thoughtful in regard to all that concerned the comfort of his liege lady, when Bob returned with this message he looked wistfully into the face, whose wearied aspect was caused by the anxious thoughts that she vainly endeavored to banish from her mind.

"I'll take Lionel and baby out into the garden. Shall I, ma'am?"

"If you will, Robert, I shall be glad. I have a little headache; and they will enjoy being out in the open air, I dare say."

Taking a new magazine from the library table, Geraldine took a seat in the deep recess of one of the bay-windows, and endeavored to interest herself in its contents.

Finding this to be a hopeless task, with a weary sigh she let it fall upon her knee.

Her eyes wandered around the quiet room, with its pleasant appointments, then out of the window upon the beautiful prospect that extended as far as the eye could reach.

There floated up to her from the garden beneath the gleeful sound of childish voices, the sweetest of all music to a mother's ear.

What a safe and pleasant haven this had been to her from the fierce tempest that had made a wreck of every other refuge!

How long would it be open to her?

How long would she be able to keep secret the terrible crime, whose revelation would make her again a homeless wanderer, with the mark of Cain upon her forehead, even if she escaped the penalty of a shameful death?

And her kind friends and protectors, whose love and confidence, manifested in so many ways, had become so dear, with what horror and loathing would they shrink away from her if they knew what might come to their knowledge at any moment!

She knew that Antonelli had left her in a state of mind that would make him reckless as to what he did or said, but she knew, also, that his anger was as short-lived as it was hot and hasty; that if his resentment had time to cool, his naturally kind heart would prevent a merciless use of the power he possessed.

So her heart was divided between hope and fear, a state of mind which made her watch eagerly for news, especially from one quarter, anxious, and yet afraid to hear.

Hearing the sound of wheels, she looked out. It was Pat, with the new girl, who, before the man could offer his assistance, jumped out of the wagon to the ground, disappearing from view behind some trees and shrubbery.

Presently Bob came running in to her with a letter.

She recognized the hand at once, observing that it was thicker than the usually brief missives that had reached her from the same quarter, and surmising that it was not from Mr. Smith, but from his secretary, dismissed her messenger before breaking the seal.

Its contents were as follows:

"DEAR GERALDINE,—I ask you to hear patiently the last appeal that I shall ever make to you. Nor would I trouble you with this were I sure that you thoroughly understood yourself or what you were doing.

"You solemnly pledged yourself to me. Through no fault of mine or yours, but in consequence of false and treacherous misrepresentations, you were induced to marry another man.

"Hard as it was to give you up, I accepted as final your decision that we were to be as strangers, nor can you say that I have made any efforts, during your husband's life, to induce you to change it.

"But now that he is dead, you are free.

"You say that your feelings have entirely changed, that you love me no longer, but you mingle so much that is improbable in this assurance, make so many strange allusions, that I cannot but believe that you are influenced by a morbid feeling, occasioned by dwelling too much upon the wrongs and sorrows of the past, and from which I would so gladly shield you in the future.

"Even though you rejected my suit, as you have an undoubted right to do, why you should regard with such a feeling of horror the slightest allusion to my love, or our possible marriage, is something that I cannot understand, except that it springs from the strange delusion that it would be a wrong to the dead.

"In spite of your discouraging words, the hope is strong within me that down deep in your heart your love for me still lives—that we shall both yet be as happy in each other's love as we have been in the past.

"My dear Geraldine—how dear, words are powerless to tell you—I entreat that you will not make a shipwreck of my happiness, as well as yours, through a mistaken idea of making reparation for some error in the past.

"I don't see how it could be, but even if your husband's death was occasioned by his unfortunate discovery of our meeting, and all that followed, I cannot believe that he would wish you to make a sacrifice of your whole life as an atonement, nor can I understand what good it is going to do him, or any one.

"I ask you to weigh the matter well, and write me. Remember that your answer will be final, and that it will bring me great joy or great sorrow.

"I have made a confidant of Mr. Smith, so far as my love for you and our past relations are concerned, and he fully approves my suit, promising me a responsible position abroad, with double the salary I am having now.

"This, by removing us from the scene of so many painful recollections, will be a pleasant change to us both.

"Your children shall be mine, and no home happier than ours. Lovingly, ANTONIO ANTONELLI."

Geraldine read this letter, from the first to the concluding line, and then, thrusting it into her pocket, arose, with the intention of going to her own room.

As she approached the partly-open door, she saw a sturdy form upon the threshold, while a voice that sounded startlingly familiar, said:

"If ye plase, ma'am, I'm the new girl—Bridget Connor's me name. Will ye tell me——"

As the speaker obtained a clearer view of Geraldine, she stopped, staring wildly into her face.

"The saints be good to us!" she ejaculated in a tone of delighted surprise, "an' is it yersilf, ma'am? Niver did I think to look upon yer swate face again!"

Geraldine was not long in recognizing the broad, rosy face of the speaker, or all the complications to which her unexpected advent would be likely to give rise.

"Come in and close the door, Bridget," she said, in as calm and steady a tone as she could command.

The girl obeyed; and as soon as her rather incoherent expressions of joy and surprise would allow her, Geraldine continued:

"I am glad to see you, too, Bridget, or rather, I should be if I were not afraid that it might bring upon me a great misfortune."

"How cud that be, ma'am?" said the girl in a tone of surprise. "Sure, an' you can't think that I'd do ye the laste bit of harrum?"

"You wouldn't mean to, and yet you might do so, all the same. No one knows me here by the name I had when you knew me, or where I came from. If it should get out it might result in my being taken back there; you wouldn't wish to do anything to cause that?"

"The saints presarve us! indade, an' I wudn't, ma'am. Niver a word will I spake that wud give thim the laste idea that iver I set eyes on ye ontil now. Glory be to God! an' so ye got away all right? Mony's the time I've thought of ye sence the day I seen ye floatin' down the river in that shell of a boat, that didn't look as if it cud bear a haporth more without goin' to the bottom. The man that brung me from the deppo was tillin' me of a lady, that was governess here, bein' fished up out of the river, but I niver dramed it was you."

As much confidence as Geraldine had reason to place in Bridget, she was no way inclined to tell her all that had intervened since then.

"My good girl, your faithfulness in the past gives me every reason to trust you. You had better go now; it will be considered strange if you stay any longer. Remember that my name is now Mrs. Geraldine."

Bridget looked back from the door, through which she disappeared a moment later.

"I won't forgit. Don't ye be afther havin' the laste fear, ma'am."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN UNWELCOME REPLY.

AFTER sending the letter given to the reader in the preceding chapter, Antonelli waited with an eager impatience that made the hours seem like days to him, for a response.

Hope being a strong element in his character, it was largely in excess of his fears, especially when he pondered on the encouragement that he had received from Mr. Smith.

Not that he was so foolish as to suppose that the result would put him at once on the footing of an accepted suitor,

but he felt that it would, by softening her feelings and re-establishing something of their former intimacy, pave the way to that happy event.

It was one of his duties to receive and take charge of all letters, and he now watched all that came with an interest that he had never felt before; his heart beating fast as he saw, one morning, that well-remembered hand.

Contrary to his usual custom, instead of passing through his own room to that of his employer, he paused there, tearing the letter open with eager and trembling hands.

Let us look over his shoulder, as he reads.

"ANTONIO,—I had hoped that you would spare yourself the pain of this appeal, and me the hard and sorrowful task of replying to it.

"I told you, at our last interview, that the shock of my husband's death killed my love for you: it did more—it aroused a remorseful tenderness that has gradually changed my whole attitude toward him, making it impossible for me to give to any other the place where he is enshrined in my heart.

"Not long after his death I came across my husband's diary, which he had kept ever since our first meeting, and it contained such a revelation, not only of his inherent worth and goodness, and the love and devotion that met with so cold a return, but of my own folly and blindness, that it created an entire revolution in my feelings.

"You say that my husband is dead—but he lives in my heart, *he will live there always.*

"I was the cause of his death—it matters not how—and I have made a solemn vow to devote myself entirely to his children, so far as I am permitted to do so.

"I dreamed once that he came to me, and putting our baby in my arms—the child that in his jealous fury he repudiated—kissed us both.

"Since then my heart has been less heavy and sorrowful.

"Remaining faithful to hi memory through all the years of my earthly pilgrimage, I hope some day to meet him, and receive his kiss of forgiveness and love.

"There is no morbid feeling in this, Antonio, but a deep-seated conviction that it is the path of duty, which can alone lead to peace.

"By consenting to a marriage without love, I made a shipwreck of my husband's happiness as well as my own, and shall I now do you the same wrong?

"I ask you not only to leave me to the life that I have marked out for myself, but to help me to live it.

"That you may be happy with the love of some better

and happier woman is the earnest wish of one, who, though she can never be more to you, would gladly remain always

"Your friend and sister,

"GERALDINE."

How long Antonelli remained pondering over this unwelcome missive he could not have told had he tried, but he was aroused from the train of reflections to which it gave rise by the impatient jingle of the bell over his desk, and which communicated with that of his employer in the adjoining room.

Taking the letter he had received, together with some others that came with it, and which were directed to Mr. Smith, he passed into the room where that gentleman had for some time been impatiently expecting his appearance.

"I trust that you will excuse this long delay, sir. I have been reading this letter. I wrote to Mrs. Geraldine, as you advised me to do, and this is her reply. You have taken so much kindly interest in the affair that I can do no less than give it to you for perusal."

Mr. Smith looked at the disturbed face of the speaker, his own scarcely less agitated, and then taking the letter signed him to leave the room.

An hour dragged its slow length along, and Antonelli sat at his desk in the same dejected attitude that he had occupied for the last fifteen minutes.

Feeling a light touch upon his shoulder he glanced up, being not a little startled at seeing his employer, who was standing just back of him, and who had never entered his room before.

"Mr. Antonelli, this is a heavy disappointment to you. That you should consider it in the light of a great misfortune is very natural; but it would be a much greater one for you to marry a woman who had no love for you."

"But she loved me once," was the bitter response. "And never did I love her so passionately, so madly as now! It is very hard to give her up; especially so to have it occasioned by such a strange, incomprehensible devotion to a man who needs her love no longer."

"It may not be so strange as you think," said Mr. Smith, resuming something of his old caustic tone and manner, "though I dare say that it is incomprehensible."

Then, his eye softening as it rested upon the gloomy face of his companion, he continued in quite another tone:

"You certainly ought to respect the motives that govern her. She would be doing you a great wrong to marry you, feeling as she does. So cheer up and be glad that it is no worse."

Antonelli was in no mood to be "cheered up" in so short a time as this.

He shook his head disconsolately.

"It's easy talking, sir; especially when it's something you've had no experience in. I don't suppose that you were ever seriously in love with any woman in your life."

Coloring, Mr. Smith looked keenly at the speaker, whose countenance showed that he was entirely absorbed by his own pain and disappointment.

"That is as it may be," he said, dryly.

Antonelli continued:

"My whole life is a blank; I shall never know what it is to have a happy day again."

As disposed as Mr. Smith was to sympathize with his secretary, he actually smiled at this speech, something that Antonelli had never seen him do before; its transforming influence giving his face such a different expression that it hardly seemed the same.

But it vanished almost as quickly as it came.

"Nonsense! Young, with good health and bright prospects, you have any number of happy days before you. Before you met her, this last time, you were not unhappy; on the contrary, you seemed to get a good deal of enjoyment out of life. Under the favoring influences of new scenes and a change of occupation, a year hence you will have forgotten all about it. You will remember what I promised to do, in case you married this lady? That opportunity is still open to you. If I remember rightly, you were born in Italy, having relatives there?"

"Yes, sir. I was a mere boy when I left, but I remember my native country well."

"So I recollect hearing you say. Also, that you had a strong desire to revisit it. Now, it is in my power to offer you a position at one of the principal ports there, to attend to the consignment of fruit, wine, etc., to a wholesale house in this city. The salary will be liberal and the duties neither hard nor unpleasant. Now, what do you say to this offer?"

"That I should like nothing better."

"If you accept, you will have to leave within a week."

"I shall be ready at any time," exclaimed Antonelli, rising to his feet; "the sooner the better."

"You will have ample time to get your outfit. I think you have decided wisely. Of course, I shall be sorry to lose my secretary, but it is the best course for you to take under the circumstances, as well as for all concerned."

"I don't think that you will find it hard to supply my place," said Antonelli, after a moment's thought; "I don't feel that I have earned half what you've paid me. In fact,

I have sometimes thought that you kept me more for my sake than your own."

"You are wrong; you have been useful to me in more ways than one, earning all that I have paid you."

"I am glad to know that. Ever since our first meeting, in that old farm-house by the river, you have manifested a kindly interest in me that I had no right to expect from a stranger. I feel it very sensibly, especially this last proof of it, as it will enable me to put into execution what I have long wished to do."

Antonelli was very busy for the next few days in getting his outfit, and receiving instructions from his new employer in regard to the duties that would be required of him in the new position he would fill; all the bustle and excitement consequent upon this complete change in his life having a most happy effect upon him, by rousing him from his gloom and despondency, and turning his thoughts into different channels.

"I have everything in readiness, now," he said, one morning, to Mr. Smith. "It is now Monday, and as the vessel will not sail till to-morrow evening, I think I will run up to Riverview."

Antonelli said this in a hesitating, inquiring tone, as if a little doubtful as to how it would be received.

"Do you think that would be a wise thing to do?"

"It would be a satisfaction to me; and I don't know as there would be any harm in it. You object, I see?"

"I have no right to object; nor have I, personally, any objection to offer," said Mr. Smith. "I am only questioning its wisdom as to yourself, as well as the lady, whom, I infer, you are going to see."

Then, after a moment's thought, and in a graver tone:

"I trust that you have no intention of annoying this lady by reopening a question in regard to which she has expressed herself so clearly and decidedly? Her friendless and unprotected position ought to make her doubly sacred against anything that looks like persecution, as this most assuredly would."

"Believe me, sir, I have not the slightest intention of doing this. On the eve of leaving the country, perhaps never to return, I merely wish to bid her farewell in person, instead of by letter, as I first thought of doing. Not a word will pass my lips that could possibly give her the least annoyance."

Mr. Smith was so long in replying, that Antonelli turned, an impatient look upon his face.

"You consider, perhaps, that a parting interview would be satisfactory to both?"

"I think so. It would be to me, I know."

There was another pause, almost as long as the first.

"I think, on the whole, that it would be as well for you to do as you propose. Tell Mrs. Geraldine, that as soon as you are gone, I am coming to see her."

Antonelli had moved toward the door; he now turned back.

"Mr. Smith, I trust that you are contemplating no change in your arrangements for your ward; in short, that his present governess will continue to take charge of him?"

"She is fond of the boy, then?"

"Very fond. I think that it would break her heart to part with him."

"Most mothers are attached to their children, I believe."

Changing color, Antonelli looked at the speaker, thinking that his ears must have deceived him.

"Mr. Smith!"

Without appearing to notice the speaker's astonishment and dismay, Mr. Smith continued:

"I have known for several months, ever since he has been under her care, in fact, the true relation that this lady sustains to Lionel."

"I—you amaze me, sir. And to think that she should be so afraid of your finding it out!"

"Am I so hard a man, that she should stand in so much fear of me?"

There was something in the tone, even more than the words, that touched the warm, impulsive heart of the listener.

"No, indeed; I have not found you so, at all events. But then, you see, she does not know you."

"True. It may be said, in excuse for many misunderstandings, that she has never really known me, or I her."

Somewhat mystified by these words, and which seemed to be spoken to himself rather than to him, Antonelli was silent for a moment.

Then he said:

"Have I your permission to tell her this?"

"Yes; I think that it is best now that she should know it."

"And may I tell her also, that you will make no change in regard to the boy?"

"You may say that I am coming to talk matters over with her. Now, unless you hurry, you will miss the boat. Remember that you must be back to-morrow without fail."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ANTONELLI'S sudden arrival at Riverview was quite as unexpected to its occupants as his previous appearance.

Lionel was the first to spy him, as he came up the walk.

"There's Mr. Tony!" he shouted, running down to meet him in glad anticipation of the toys and sweetmeats of which he was generally the bearer.

Geraldine, who was sitting by the window, half arose, and then, conscious that she had been seen, resumed her seat, her changing color alone showing her secret agitation and disturbance.

Antonelli addressed himself to Mrs. Graham, who, mindful of her duties as hostess, came forward to greet him.

"You hardly expected to see me so soon, Mrs. Graham; but I leave the country to-morrow evening for an indefinite period, and thought that I would pay a farewell visit to my friends at Riverview."

"I am very glad you did. Going to leave the country, did you say? Is not that a very sudden thing?"

"Rather so. I certainly had no thought of going a week ago, though it is something that I have long desired to do. Knowing this, Mr. Smith has kindly placed at my disposal a pleasant and lucrative position in one of the ports of my native country, and which I was only too glad to accept."

Antonelli glanced at Geraldine as he said this, who was listening with eager attention.

Then, observing Lionel's wistful looks, he added, with a smile:

"I didn't bring you anything this time, Master Lionel; I came away in too great a hurry. But your guardian is coming to Riverview before long, and he'll make amends, I dare say."

"Is Mr. Smith really coming?" cried Mrs. Graham. "How glad I am! I was telling Francis, only yesterday, that I did hope he would come before the season was over; everything looks so much pleasanter in the summer. He has been confined in the city so many months that a trip to the country will do him good."

It being near tea-time, excusing herself, Mrs. Graham now went out, leaving the two together.

"Is what you told Mrs. Graham really so?" said Geraldine, glancing a little timidly at the face that wore such a different aspect when she saw it last.

"That I am going to leave the country? It certainly is. Something that you are not at all sorry to hear, I suppose."

In spite of Antonelli's good resolutions, he found it impossible not to infuse a certain amount of tender reproach in these words.

Geraldine's face flushed a little, as she said:

"It would be a very unfriendly act in me to regret what you seem to consider such a pleasant and desirable opening. I didn't refer to that, however, but to what you said about Lionel's guardian. Is he really coming to Riverview?"

"That is what he told me. Come down into the garden with me a few minutes, Geraldine. Now, that I am on the point of leaving the country, you surely might grant me that much. Little pitchers have large ears, you know," glancing at Lionel, "and I really have something of importance to say to you."

Geraldine's only response to this was to rise and join him by the half-open door, and together the two moved down toward the arbor, where they had had their first interview.

Geraldine's countenance showed no little anxiety and agitation; her words indicated plainly the direction that her thoughts had taken.

"Does what you have to say relate to Lionel?"

"It does. Mr. Smith knows that he is your son."

Geraldine turned white to the lips, and there was indignation as well as grief in her tones, as she said:

"You have told him, then?"

"I have not told him a word."

"He has inferred it from what you have said, at all events. And this is your boasted honor; dealing a backhanded blow to the woman that you profess to love above all others!"

The anger that Antonelli felt at these stinging words, especially their injustice, vanished as he saw the grief and despair in the pale face that confronted him.

"You wrong me, Geraldine, as you cannot fail to see when I tell you that Mr. Smith knew that you were the mother of his ward at the time he sent him to you; which was certainly before *I* had any idea of it."

"Mr. Smith knew that I was Lionel's mother before he sent him to me?" repeated Geraldine, with a dazed, bewildered air. "How strange!"

"That is what he told me; and I have no reason to doubt his word. When Mr. Smith spoke about going to Riverview, I referred to your strong affection for the boy; expressing the hope that he would remain under your care. He replied by saying 'that it was natural for a mother to love her child,' or words to that effect; going on to state what I have already told you. I was greatly astonished. I don't think you could have been much more so, as it was something I had never dreamed of."

"Was that all? Did he tell you nothing more?"

"I asked him if I was to tell you this. He said yes, that he thought it was best that you should know it."

"Go on," said Geraldine, in a stifled voice, evidently speaking with an effort.

"I asked him if I should tell you, also, that there would be no change in regard to the boy. He said that I was to say to you that he would see you shortly and talk matters over."

Geraldine sank down upon the rustic seat by which she was standing.

"To talk matters over—ah, me! Did he say whether he intended making any change or no?"

"That was all the reply he made. I was just on the point of leaving; there was no time for many words."

"But if he knows that Lionel is my son, he must know also——"

Here Geraldine abruptly paused.

"Antonio," she added, "answer me truly, is what you have told me all that passed between you?"

"As far as I can recollect, it is certainly all that passed between us of any moment."

"My dear Geraldine," added Antonelli, after a few moments of perplexed silence, "while it is natural that you should feel some anxiety in regard to Mr. Smith's coming, I can't understand why you should be so distressed and frightened. From what I know of him—and it seems as if I knew him better the last few weeks than any time before—I am confident that he will not be so unjust and cruel as to take Lionel from you. And even if it were otherwise, the remedy is in your own hands. All you have to do is to appeal to the law, that considers a mother to be the natural guardian of a child of such tender years."

"The law?" said Geraldine, with a shudder. "God help and pity me! There are things that lie back of this—things that I can speak of to no one."

Here the sound of a bell was heard, followed by the merry voice of Lionel, who came running down the walk toward them.

"There is the tea-bell," added Geraldine, rising to her feet. "Go on before me. I will follow in a few moments."

CHAPTER XL.

THE FULFILLED DREAM.

GERALDINE did not see Antonelli again until the next morning, when he was just on the point of leaving.

The aversion that she felt for him, and which had grown out of his persistency in urging a suit that had become hateful to her, had vanished since the announcement of his

departure, especially since she became convinced that instead of betraying her, as she had at first thought, he had done all he could to save her from the difficulties and perils that were thickening around her.

This gave an added warmth and gentleness to her very look and manner, and which made her very charming to Antonelli's beauty-loving nature, as his eyes, as they rested upon her lovely face, testified.

The two were standing out upon the porch together, whither Antonelli had gone to wait for the carriage.

"I hope you are not blaming me for anything?" he said.

"No; on the contrary, I feel that I owe you many thanks for your efforts to defend and protect me. My best and warmest wishes will accompany you to the new life to which you are going."

"I wish that you were going with me, Geraldine."

Geraldine gently removed the hand, around which the speaker's closed with a warm pressure.

"It is better as it is; better for us both. You will some day be glad that it is so."

Antonelli shook his head.

"It doesn't seem at all likely to me now."

Then a moment later:

"What shall I say to Mr. Smith?"

The unwonted color in Geraldine's cheeks receded at these words.

"Say that I shall be glad to see him. That I hope that he will not keep me in suspense, but come soon."

Antonelli noticed the change in Geraldine's look and tone.

"I think you will feel better after seeing him; being quite sure that it will be the means of relieving your mind of the doubts and fears that you seem to entertain concerning him."

Pat now driving up with the carriage, there was no opportunity for anything more than the general adieus that followed, for which Geraldine was not sorry.

After watching the carriage disappear down the avenue, she went to her own room; glad that this ordeal was over, and wishing that the one to which her thoughts now turned with such dark forebodings was as happily ended.

She had vainly tried to recall some old acquaintance of her husband by the name of Smith.

She remembered hearing him speak of an uncle of that name, from whom he had been named, but was under the impression that he had died some years ago.

This Mr. Smith might be a son; his telling Antonelli

that he had known her husband when a boy gave a strong air of probability to this inference.

To this was added the coincidence of the initial letters of their Christian names being the same.

On thinking the matter over, she become convinced that Lionel's guardian was the son of Uncle Robert, and, therefore, her husband's cousin.

This near relationship gave her little comfort, however, in looking forward to their approaching interview, and all to which it was likely to lead.

When Geraldine reached her room, she found Bridget there, putting it to rights.

She was the same honest, outspoken soul, taking the same kindly interest in her former mistress; in her simplicity and good-heartedness, frequently making allusions, when they were by themselves, from which Geraldine would gladly have been spared.

"An' so poor Misther Bayard niver came back at all, at all?"

"No."

"It's me belafe thim murtherin' thaves av the world spirited him off. They ain't a bit too good for't onyway. Did I tell ye, ma'am, that I once thought I see him?"

"Thought that you saw my husband, Bridget? Where was that?"

"'Twas in New York, at the Grand Centhral Deppo, ma'am. I was goin' in the dure, when I run against a gintleman that was jist comin' out, an' who looked as much like him as one pay is like another.

"'The Lord be praised! is that you, Misther Bayard?' says I. 'And did ye find yer wife?'

"He looked at me real hard for a minute.

"'Bayard isn't me name,' says he, 'an' I haven't ony wife.'

"I was struck all of a heap whin he said this.

"'I beg pardon,' says I; 'I thought it wor the husband av a lady I used to work for.'

"'There's no harm done,' says he.

"With that he walks off, lavin' me a-starin' afther him till he was lost in the crowd."

"It is only a curious coincidence," said Geraldine.

"A what?" said Bridget, with a puzzled air.

"A chance resemblance, such as we sometimes see between people in no way related. I never expect to see my husband again in this life."

Here Bridget was summoned below.

Geraldine sighed heavily as she listened to the sound of the closing door

How vain were all her efforts to win forgetfulness and peace!

In how many different ways was she reminded of the sin that would not be covered, staring her in the face at every turn?

"Mr. Smith writes Francis that he will be here on the midday train," said Mrs. Graham to Geraldine, the following morning.

Not all Geraldine's efforts at self-control could prevent the sudden paling of her cheek at this announcement.

Mrs. Graham noticed this, and being now accustomed to what she considered sprung from undue sensitiveness, said, with a smile:

"I really believe that you are afraid of Mr. Smith and dread his coming.

"I don't see how you can with such a convincing proof of your success and capacity as this before you," she added, glancing at Lionel. "I declare! I should hardly know the boy; he looked so pale and spiritless when he came, and is looking now so healthy, rosy and happy."

As Geraldine looked at the kind face, which was so expressive of the kindly spirit that actuated these words, a strong impulse came over her to ease her heart of the heavy weight that oppressed it, by forestalling a revelation that she now felt was inevitable.

Then she checked herself. For the sake of her children, upon whose innocent heads it would bring so much unmerited shame, it must be done by other lips than hers.

"I hope she won't have one of her headaches," thought Mrs. Graham, as Geraldine left the room. "She is so apt to, if anything troubles her, especially of this kind. How strange, when she shows so much sense in every other way, she should have so little in this respect."

Mrs. Graham's fears were not realized. Geraldine performed her usual morning duties; a little more silent and abstracted, perhaps, but showing no indication of that much-dreaded malady.

Instead of sending Pat, Dr. Graham himself went to the station for their expected guest, dinner being delayed an hour in honor of his arrival.

Geraldine kept herself strictly to the school-room, trying to busy herself with the accustomed duties, but listening with feverish suspense to any unusual sounds.

Nearly two hours passed, and while she wondered at this delay, Mrs. Graham entered.

"I don't think we will wait any longer; you must be faint. I don't see what has detained them."

"Perhaps the train was late."

"No; it can't be that. We always hear it at one point, and I'm sure I heard it at the usual time."

Hearing the sound of carriage wheels, Mrs. Graham turned to the window.

"It's Francis, and he's alone," she said, hurrying from the room.

Geraldine lingered a few minutes, and then went down to the dining-room, but there was no one there.

On stepping out upon the porch, she heard the sound of Dr. Graham's voice in the library, talking to his wife.

It was evident that their guest had disappointed them.

Geraldine was disappointed too; for though she dreaded seeing this man, she knew that it was something that must be, and the suspense she was suffering was growing more intolerable every day.

Over half an hour passed; then the dinner-bell sounding, Geraldine re-entered the dining-room, finding Dr. Graham and his wife already seated at the table.

Somewhat to her surprise, nothing was said about the non-appearance of Mr. Smith, nor was his name mentioned.

The doctor had a grave, preoccupied air, while his wife looked nervous and excited to a degree that not only surprised Geraldine, but inspired her with a vague feeling of uneasiness.

Mrs. Graham betrayed more than usual anxiety that Geraldine should be supplied with whatever was on the table, especially that she should drink the strong cup of coffee that she prepared with her own hands, but aside from the conversation incidental to this, the meal was discussed in almost total silence.

When Dr. Graham rose from the table, Geraldine ventured to say:

"You didn't find Mr. Smith at the depot?"

The doctor cleared his throat twice before he spoke.

"Yes, he was there. He will be here by and by."

Without pausing for a reply, Dr. Graham left the room, going directly to the library, whither his wife followed him.

With feelings that it would be impossible to describe, Geraldine went to her own room.

Dr. Graham's long absence, his wife's excited and disturbed manner, all was clear to her now.

He and Mr. Smith had met; nor could she doubt the nature and result of this conference.

Concealment was no longer possible, the blow had fallen; that which she had so long and greatly feared had come upon her; and, as is often the case, she found it less terrible than she had anticipated.

After the first shock had passed a feeling of calmness

came over her, born of something higher and nobler than despair.

There was One before whom her whole life lay open, who knew the wrong teachings, the evil influences that surrounded her early years; how earnestly she had striven to atone, how patiently and steadfastly she had walked in the path of duty, so far as she had the light to see what that path was.

However she might humble herself to God, it was not for her to shrink before the gaze of her brother man, who, with the same ignorance, under the same circumstances, might have done far worse than she.

Geraldine heard, like one in a dream, the sound of carriage wheels, followed, a few minutes later, by a summons to the library.

Dr. Graham met her at the door, conducting her to a seat opposite his own.

His disturbed and agitated manner, so different from anything that she had ever seen in him before, had the natural effect of calming her own.

"I thought that I should find Mr. Smith here," she said, glancing around.

"He is in the house. I have had a long talk with him. He desired me to see you first, and prepare you somewhat for what he feared would be too great a surprise."

"I beg that you will assure this gentleman that I need no preparation. I can readily understand the nature of his disclosures concerning me. Nor can I say that they are not, in all probability, substantially true. It is you that must have been surprised."

"I was surprised, certainly, and so, I think, will you be when you know who this man is."

"I know that he is my son's guardian, and as such I wish to see him."

"He is more than that."

"I know the relation that he sustains to both my children."

Dr. Graham turned a startled look upon the speaker's face.

Geraldine continued.

"I remember hearing their father speak of his Uncle Robert; I believe this man to be his son."

It was some moments before Dr. Graham spoke. When he did it was slowly, and with the air of one choosing his words carefully as he went on.

"Mrs. Bayard—I call you by your rightful name, you see—you are laboring under a grave mistake. As a physician, I must ask you to nerve yourself to meet a great and joy-

ful surprise. Lionel's guardian sustains to your children a much nearer relation than this."

Geraldine arose to her feet.

"You are talking very strangely, Dr. Graham. I have few relations, and my husband had fewer still."

"You say that your husband is dead; but there are cases of mistaken identity which have led to grave errors——"

The window by which Geraldine stood reached to the floor, opening out upon the portico.

As Dr. Graham spoke a dusky form paused beside it.

A moment later a dark face was thrust into the room, whose gleaming eyes glared at Geraldine with a look of fiendish triumph.

Another moment, and it stepped through the window and confronted her.

"I's tracked you down at las'! I allers thought you got away, an' when I heeard of a woman bein' found in the water, I's sure of it. You've 'scaped the dungeon an' the water, but you won't 'scape the hangman's rope——"

Here a man, who had entered the room back of the speaker, laid a heavy hand on her shoulder.

"Silence, Prue!"

Paying no heed to the woman who cowered in one corner of the room, in a mortal terror from whose effect she never fully recovered, Robert Bayard lifted up the insensible form that was lying at his feet, and laid it upon a couch in an adjoining room.

"Is she dead?" he cried, as he bent distractedly over it.

"Oh, no!" said Dr. Graham, who, assisted by his wife, was busy in applying restoratives. "See! the color is coming back to her face now. Stand back a little, so she will not see you."

Opening her eyes, Geraldine looked wildly around.

"I thought I saw my husband. Oh! tell me, doctor, was it, indeed, he?"

At this moment Lionel, who could not be restrained any longer, sprung forward.

"Oh! mamma, papa has got back! And I'm so glad!"

Taking up Isabel, Mr. Bayard placed her in her mother's arms.

"Your dream has come true," he whispered, as, putting his arms around his wife and child, he kissed them both.

Feeling that it was a scene too sacred for other eyes to witness, Dr. Graham quietly withdrew, leaving them together.

CHAPTER XLI.

CONCLUSION.

We will relate briefly to the reader Robert Bayard's account to his wife of his almost miraculous restoration to life, and final escape from the underground cell at Hunter's Lodge.

The loss of blood, which flowed freely from the wound he had received, was, under God, the means of saving his life.

For several hours he lay like one dead; then he aroused sufficiently to realize something of his surroundings.

It was very brief, however, he relapsing immediately into a state of half-unconsciousness, combined with a helplessness which made it impossible for him to make the slightest sound.

How long he remained in this state it is impossible to say, but probably for several days.

When he recovered entire consciousness, so as to remember clearly all that had happened, he was weak from want of food.

On groping about, his hands came in contact with the loaf of bread and pitcher of water he had left there for Geraldine, of which he partook eagerly, using moderation on account of his long fast.

Having regained something of his old strength, he began to devise how he was to get out of his present uncomfortable quarters.

The door was locked, nor was there any possibility of his making himself heard through the thick walls that surrounded him.

Suddenly he remembered that one of the heavy stones that formed it was capable of being moved from its place by means of a secret spring, known only to himself, and which he had discovered one day by the merest accident when he was examining the place.

But even then he was by no means sure that it would be large enough to admit of the egress of a person of his breadth of shoulders and chest, but it was his only chance, and he determined to try it.

On trial, he found that the aperture thus formed would admit him with ease.

On passing through, he found himself in a narrow passage-way, that led to the little cave, partly natural and partly artificial, which opened out upon the river, and which is already familiar to the reader.

As he stood looking out upon the water, and pondering on what he should do to get across, he saw something floating toward him.

On closer inspection, he saw that it was a human body,

The advancing tide brought it so near to him that by grasping it by the hair, that was thick and curly, he was able to drag it to the mouth of the cave.

On finding that it was the body of a man of about his own age and size, and with very much the same hair and complexion, he conceived the idea of placing his own clothing on it and thus inducing his wife to think that she had accomplished what he, at that time, believed to be the settled purpose of her heart, rather than the unreasoning and frantic impulse that he was led to consider it at a later day.

After thoroughly drying the garments, he effected the exchange. Then carrying the body into the cell, he placed it in the same position in which he had fallen, and passing back into the passage-way, moved the stone back into its place.

On returning to the mouth of the cave, he encountered Bridget, who had just seen her mistress off, and whose fright at his unexpected appearance the reader will remember.

Taking advantage of the swoon into which the girl fell, he secreted himself in an obscure corner, from which he observed the direction she took in the rapid flight immediately after her recovery.

Following this, he came to the long flight of stairs, already described, and which led to the rooms above.

As it was now broad daylight, and he was desirous of leaving the house unobserved, he decided to wait until evening before he attempted to mount them.

As soon as it was dusk he crept cautiously up to the door, which was in the same condition in which Bridget left it in the morning.

After listening intently to see if he could hear any sound, he opened the door and looked in, almost as much surprised as relieved to find the coast clear.

Gaspardo and Rattle having gone in pursuit of Geraldine, there was no one but Prue in the house, who generally kept herself to her especial province at the back part of it; so there was no one to observe his movements.

Fortunately, having collected a large amount of money lately, he had it about him, and taking some articles of clothing, together with some papers, with him, he passed out through an unfrequented part of the house, striking into a narrow cross path which led by the quickest possible route to the highway.

With his mind full of the purpose which had taken such strong possession of him, and anxious to get away as far as possible from the scene of so many painful associations, he

took his way down the river, along which Geraldine had passed, all unknown to him, the night before.

The evening being clear and starlight, he had no difficulty in finding his way.

His strong, elastic constitution enabled him to bear up wonderfully against the heavy strain upon it.

Under the stimulus of the excitement under which he was laboring, he walked along briskly for some time.

But at last his strength began to fail him, the wound in his head throbbed and burned, an occasional dizziness coming over him which obliged him to sit down by the roadside.

But still he pushed ahead, having made considerable progress by the dawn of day.

Feeling utterly unable to continue any further without rest and refreshment, he was not sorry to come in sight of a village hotel.

Mr. Bayard's full name was Robert Smith Bayard, and firm in his resolution to conceal his identity, at least for the present, he decided to transpose it, registering himself as R. B. Smith.

By noon he was obliged to take to his bed; by night, to have a physician.

He was attended by Dr. Graham, under whose care he improved so rapidly that in a week's time he was able to be removed to his house.

Much of what followed the reader already knows.

It was not until Mr. Bayard listened to Geraldine's wild ravings, during the fever that followed her arrival at Riverview, that he knew how little cause there was for the fierce jealousy that had turned all his love and tenderness to fury, that had led him to so much that was harsh and unjust.

It was not until then that he fully realized the extenuating circumstances attending much that he could not but condemn in his wife's conduct, or understood the temporary madness that impelled her to an act so foreign to her nature.

But all the remorse and newly-awakened tenderness that this reaction aroused only strengthened his determination to allow her to consider herself free.

He was still further strengthened in his resolution by his meeting with Antonelli, and all that he told him.

It was then that he conceived the idea of bringing the two together, and thus insuring their happiness.

Even after he learned of the hold that he had obtained on his wife's heart, and the tenderness in which she held his memory, he decided upon the final test that was to

prove to him the depth and sincerity of her love, and how far he could build upon it for their mutual happiness.

How happily this test ended, the reader knows.

We will sum up briefly in regard to the rest of our characters.

Rattle and Petro Gaspardo, Geraldine's younger brother, fled the country, and were never heard of again.

Prue, whose mind had been affected for some months, never recovered from the shock of her master's unexpected appearance, and which she supposed to be his disembodied spirit.

In memory of her long and faithful service, Mr. Bayard had her kindly cared for at a private asylum until she died.

Bridget lives with Geraldine, who would hardly know how to dispense with her honest and loyal service.

Antonelli is very well satisfied and prosperous in his new home and position, as his letters to Mr. Bayard testify.

He is not likely to leave them, having found a powerful magnet in the form of one of the fair daughters of his native land, to whom he is happily married.

Bob, good, honest Bob, bids fair to attain to the promise of his boyhood, being now a rising young lawyer of the Kings County bar; and better still, what some consider incompatible with that calling, an honest man.

He has paid the mortgage on Uncle John's farm, who has considerably modified his opinion of the benefit of what he terms "book-larnin'."

He is a man of few words, however, merely remarking to a neighbor who congratulated him on his nephew's prospects:

"Wife allers said that there was somethin' more'n common in Bob, an' I guess she's in the rights on't."

Aunt Jane takes a good deal of pride in her nephew, as she has an undoubted right to do, who never forgets all that he owes to her love, especially her unwavering faith in him.

Isabel, "Bob's baby," and to whom he always laid an especial claim on account of his finding her in the woods, is now a blooming miss of thirteen, inheriting her mother's beauty and her father's kind heart.

She thinks that there is no one like Robert, while she has grown dearer to his heart every succeeding year; and if that should come to pass, which may in the years that are coming, there will be no one to say them nay, certainly not Geraldine, to whom he is almost as dear as an own son now.

Not caring to live there any more, Mr. Bayard has sold Hunter's Lodge, buying a much more pleasant and cheer-

ful summer residence near Riverview, much to the satisfaction of their respective occupants, who continued to be on the friendliest of terms.

Since their happy reunion, two more children have been given to Geraldine and her husband, and which serve to bind their hearts more closely together.

Profiting by the painful experience of the past, and having learned the great lesson of mutual forbearance and mutual trust, each year enables them to realize more perfectly what marriage should be—a union of hearts as well as hands.

And here we leave them.

[THE END.]

A FATAL WOOING

By LAURA JEAN LIBBEY

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CHAPTER I.

A TERRIBLE VOW.

"Oh, pilot, 'tis a fearful night; there's danger on the deep;
I'll come and pace the deck with thee, this is no time to sleep."
"Go down!" the sailor cries. "Go down! this is no place for thee,
The night is wild, yet wilder far, the fury of the sea."

It is midnight on the ocean.

The great silver moon breaks through the white, fleecy clouds, flooding the dark, rippling waves into a sheen of sparkling, silvery brightness.

A land-bird flutters aloft, weary with long flying; lost in a world where there are no forests, but the tall, careening masts of the ships, and no foliage but the drifts of spray; it cleaves awhile to the smooth spars, till, urged by some homeward yearning, it bears on in the face of the wind, sinking, then rising over the angry waters, until its strength is gone, and the blue waves gather the poor flutterer to their cold, glassy bosom.

Ulmont Ulvesford leans his arms on the railing of the deck, gazing down into the deep, shimmering water, then up at the clouds overhead.

"By this time the following week," he told himself, "he should reach Boston."

How little the handsome young heir of the Ulvesford Silver Mines knew, as he watched the moon scudding in the blue dome above him, as he stood there, not one care on his proud, noble face, ere the sun should pierce the clouds in yonder smiling heavens, the whole course of his life would be changed.

The smile on his face deepened as he thought of the great event which was to happen on the day he reached Boston.

steamer had been due on the day previous, but, ing to unaccountable delay, they would not reach port until late the following week.

Ulmont Ulvesford passes his twenty-first birthday watching the blue waters and the bluer sky. There were few young men that could boast of a more magnificent inheritance than that to which the young heir had succeeded.

The Ulvesfords were a proud, haughty race, one of the oldest and noblest in Boston.

Glendon Ulvesford, the wealthy owner of the Ulvesford Silver Mines, had died two years before, and in the last words he uttered, he thanked God a son had been born to him, to prolong the good old name.

This son had been given them late in life, and upon him they had lavished all of their worshipful love; no wish from his infancy up had ever been denied him, and this very over-indulgence, which never sought to curb the fire of his impetuous, willful nature, was the deep root from which sprang all the keenest sorrows he experienced in his after life. Those who knew him best trembled for his future, and wondered how it would all end.

He was finely proportioned, tall, and broad-shouldered, his features were marked and fine, the white brow, over which the dark-brown hair waved, was broad and intellectual, his hazel eyes piercing and quick, and his well-cut lip, unadorned by mustache, varying with every changing feeling or momentary emotion, gave by the peculiar bend in which they were fastened in repose, a peculiar tone of scornful playfulness to every expression of his countenance,

He knew the *elite* of the country would be gathered together to bid him welcome; he smiled when he looked down into the white, seething water, thinking of the moment he should clasp pretty Loraine Lorrimer's little white hand in greeting, and watch the flush sweep across that high-bred face, clear-cut as a cameo. On the day he reached Boston he was to claim the peerless young heiress as his bride. There could be no question as to the suitability of the alliance, both were of wealthy families, young and handsome, they were both very young, yet it was much better for Ulmont Ulvesford, thought those who knew him, that he should marry young, for they knew there was a spice of fickleness in the young man's nature, which gave promise of grave results, unless they were timely nipped in the bud.

He had been abroad a year, which makes quite a difference in the human heart; and of late doubtful shadows flitted across his mind.

There could be no question of his love for his pretty, gold-

en-haired Loraine, he was true to her in word, deed and thought; still he often wondered if that one eventful moment, when influenced by some sweet, mysterious spell, he had impulsively asked Loraine to be his wife, were to be lived over again, would he have done otherwise?

He smiled as he thought how differently the poets express their dreams of love, how it thrilled the heart, ay, the very soul, how the moments that separated a lover from the one beloved, seemed the length of eternity.

Ulmont leaned his handsome head on his white hands, gazing thoughtfully down into the white foam-tipped waves, thinking how strange it was that he had experienced none of this; one week more and he should see America and Loraine, yet the thought afforded him not one extravagant pulse glow. He laughed at the sweet fancies of the poets. They had said:

"A life without love is never a perfect one."

When he had asked Loraine Lorrimer to become his wife he had fulfilled the dearest wish of his haughty, lady-mother's heart. One week more, then he could claim his bride.

A week! ah, what might happen in that time; volcanoes have swallowed peaceful villages; wind and tide destroyed great cities; whole nations in the brief interval of a week have been swept from the face of the earth.

Already a shadow no larger than a bird's wing had crossed his path, and in the distance the lowering storm clouds would suddenly burst upon his hapless head, sowing the seeds that would end in the bitterest of tragedies.

So intent was Ulmont with his own thoughts, he had not observed an old man and a young girl kneeling by his side, where the shadows were thickest, in the most secluded portion of the deck.

"To-morrow we shall reach Boston, Izetta," said the old man, wistfully, laying his hands lightly on the girl's dark curls.

"Yes, grandfather," she answered, softly, "let us hope in sunny America we may forget the past."

The old man shook his head with a long, low sigh.

"I fear not, Izetta," he replied; "the world has been cruel to me, child, cruel to the bitter end. It is hard for one of my years, Izetta, to commence gathering up the fallen ends of fortune that slipped though my heedless fingers in youth. I have lived my life, and dreamed my dreams, but, Izetta, you will never know how sweet a dream it was."

"Let us trust, dear grandfather, that in America we may yet retrieve our fallen fortunes," answered the young girl, hopefully.

"Hush!" cried the old man, with a quivering voice;

"those were the words your mother spoke long years ago."

"Poor, dear mother," sighed Izetta, gazing up at the great sorrowful stars that glittered in the blue dome above her, as if in that far-off cloud-land she could trace the fair, young mother's face that had smiled upon her under the sunny skies of Italy.

"If she had only lived, grandfather," she said, "our lives would have been so different."

"My Natalie died of a broken heart," he murmured, plaintively; "she married against my will—in vain I warned her; youth is blind and will not see. When our fortune was wasted, and the fever threatened Natalie, you were born; in the midst of all *he* fled, none knew whither—'twas said he died. The shock killed my poor Natalie; we have had a hard lot of it ever since, you and I, little one. I have tried to be very kind to you. Heaven only knows what a comfort you have been to me! Izetta, child," he said, as if stirred by a sudden impulse, "sing me the song Natalie loved so well. I feel a strange unrest; perhaps 'twill soothe me."

'Twas then the sweetest melody ever uttered by a human voice fell upon the startled ear of Ulmont Ulvesford, a voice that thrilled him to the very heart core, he could not tell why, a voice pathetic, low, and wondrous sweet, with only the wild dashing of the waves for an accompaniment, or the flapping of some night-bird's wing of plaintive, quivering note.

Ere the first vibrations of that sweet, sad strain had died away, the young heir seemed to have commenced a new life, and those bright, aimless years of his past—a desert lying far behind him.

The pale moon broke through the overhanging clouds, and Ulmont leaned breathlessly forward to gaze upon the face of the singer.

She was of scarcely sixteen summers and the face turned toward him, so wondrously lovely in its rich, dusky beauty, thrilled his heart as it had never thrilled before, a rare, brilliant, sparkling, foreign face, framed in a mass of jetty curls that fell upon the crimson cloak she wore in unconfined luxuriance; eyes, large, dark, and luminous, fringed by their heavy silken lashes, before which the stars seemed pale in their wondrous splendor. A face which ripens only under sunny foreign skies.

The shifting moonbeams pierced the fleecy clouds, flooding the dark shadows where they sat in its silvery light.

There was a time coming in the life of Ulmont Ulvesford when he would look back to that scene with almost a curse on his lips; now, he only saw its brightness, the rare, ex-

quisite face in its glorious beauty, and the beautiful eyes gazing up into the haggard face of the old man at her side with wistful tenderness.

"Did you like the song, grandfather?" she asked, softly.

His only answer was a sigh that died away in a fitful moan.

The young girl little dreamed the picture she made, her head resting on the old man's shoulder, her long curls, darker than a raven's plume, lying against his snowy beard.

"Izetta," said the old man, solemnly, turning toward her with a look she had never seen on his face before, "I have had such strange fancies, such strange forebodings to-night. In the whisperings of the wind I can hear Natalie's voice, and in those fleecy clouds I can see a white hand beckoning me. Are you there, Izetta, child? I canyot see you."

"Grandfather, oh, grandfather," she said, "are you ill? Speak to me!"

She saw a strange light gathering in his eyes, and breaking over his face. The white lips moved, but no sound issued from them. Then the roving eyes saw the figure of a young man not far from them, leaning against the railing, watching them intently.

By a great effort the old man raised his hand, and beckoned him to his side.

There was something in that pitiful appeal Ulmont Ulvesford could not resist.

Long and earnestly those strangely brilliant eyes scanned the noble young face. One hand the old man stretched out to him, and with the other clasped the young girl to his breast.

Ulmont took the outstretched hand with a firm, gentle pressure.

"You are an American?" said the old man, speaking with difficulty.

Ulmont bowed assent.

"You have an honest and noble face," he said huskily, "one I can trust."

Again Ulmont bowed over the wan, thin hand that clung tenaciously to his.

"We are strangers," continued the old man, "but I have the greatest favor to ask of you that man can grant to man."

A puzzled look swept over Ulmont's face. He scarcely knew what answer to make him.

"You are surely ill, sir," said he, gravely. "Allow me to call the ship's physician to your aid."

The other smiled faintly.

"No," he whispered, "I shall soon be beyond all help. My moments are precious. I could not die with the thought, that presses hard upon me, unspoken.

Again Ulmont insisted upon calling medical assistance, but the wan hand tightened its hold upon his own.

"I have a strange presentiment," whispered the old man. "I shall never reach America. A mist rises before me. Should anything befall me ere we reach the port will you be a brother to my child? I could not die and know she was uncared for and alone. In this belt about me you will find one hundred francs. Will you take them for her? Will you accept the trust?"

There was a strange gurgling in his throat, but the fleeting breath still clung to its mortal tenement.

Ulmont was bewildered. What should he say—what should he do?

"Promise me," wailed the old man, sharply, in an agony of entreaty. "Another moment, and my life is spent. Promise you will protect my child, come what may, and you will gain a dying man's eternal blessing. For the love of Heaven speak quickly!"

It was all so sudden Ulmont scarcely realized what he did.

How could he refuse so vital a request, with those entreating eyes burning into his very soul? He seemed as if in a strange dream.

"I promise," he answered, slowly.

"Swear it!" gasped the dying voice. "You will protect Izetta, come what may."

"I will protect Izetta, come what may," repeated Ulmont, steadily. "As I deal by your child, so may Heaven deal with me!"

"God bless you! I shall hold the trust a sacred one," whispered the faint voice.

A smile of unutterable joy lit up his wrinkled face.

"Bless you!" he muttered; then he turned to the young girl, clinging and sobbing her heart out on his breast.

"Izetta," he murmured, "Izetta——"

That beloved name was the last word Victor Rienzi ever uttered. His hands relaxed their hold; his head fell forward on his breast.

The steamer plowed heavily through the dark seething waters. The pale moon looked pityingly down from the misty clouds upon the white, horrified face of Ulmont Ulvesford and the fair, young girl, who uttered, in piercing cries:

"Grandfather! oh, my grandfather, speak to me; do not leave me all alone. See, my heart is breaking!"

The bitter cries died away over the dark, rippling water;

the stiffening fingers and the cold lips gave back no answering caress, as was their wont. It was all over. The sands of the old man's life were run. He was dead. And the *White Cresson* bore steadily on her way.

CHAPTER II.

A QUESTION OF HONOR.

ALL through the long night and the day that followed, Ulmont pondered long and earnestly over the strange predicament in which he found himself suddenly placed; he felt annoyed and perplexed.

Two days ago he was as free and untrammeled as the wind that blew; now, the responsibility of this young girl's future was thrust suddenly upon him.

He paced the deck to and fro, asking himself over and over again what he should do with her.

At first, he had thought of taking Izetta directly home; then the stern, haughty face of his lady-mother rose up before him in bitter censure, as her keen eyes fell searchingly, coldly on the timid, shrinking orphan who had been thrust so unceremoniously upon their care; then he wondered what Loraine, his promised bride, would think of this affair.

That thought disturbed him above all others; her calm proud face rose up before him in wondering disapproval.

That quite convinced him it would be the most imprudent course he could possibly pursue, taking Izetta home until he had prepared the way for her.

He was certainly vexed about the whole matter.

Since the death of her grandfather, Izetta had turned to him instinctively for sympathy, a world of unutterable woe in the mute, dark eyes raised to his face.

She was wholly adrift on the world—without rudder, or compass.

By some strange, capricious impulse, when Izetta had timidly asked him his name, he had answered by giving her his middle name—Alderic Ross.

A flush mantled his clear brow as his lips framed the name; over-indulgence through all his boyhood had given somewhat of a dash of recklessness to his nature, yet this was the *first* deception he had ever willfully lent himself to.

He quite regretted it the next moment after he had spoken.

He could hardly have told *why* he did it. Only Heaven alone could have foretold the terrible consequences which were to accrue from that one heedless act of folly.

Ulmont thought it best to acquaint Izetta at once with the plans he had made in regard to her future.

He knew just where he should find her, sitting on a coil of rope in a remote quarter of the deck; her large eyes with a far away look in them, gazing out over the water, her hands clasped idly in her lap.

Ulmont's vexation and annoyance partly vanished as he took a seat by her side.

"Izetta," he said kindly, "I have concluded it will be best to leave you at the next port, which we shall reach in probably an hour or so, while I go on alone——"

He was amazed at the startled cry which she uttered as she turned to him, ere he had finished his sentence.

"Oh, Mr. Ross," she cried, clinging tremblingly to his arm, "let me go with you, I shall surely die if I am left all alone!"

The pleading expression on the beautiful young face, the quivering lips, and the tears lying on the dark eye-lashes, touched him strangely.

"How could I lose sight, even for a day," she sobbed, "of the only kind face that has smiled upon me in the land of strangers to which we are going?"

Her great grief had so wrapped her in its mantle that she had not once thought of her future that spread out darkly before her.

Izetta was a strange picture of child and budding girlhood blended.

She had not the remotest idea of the peculiar position into which fate had drifted her.

Youth is impulsive; there was no one to warn her how far she should trust the handsome young stranger who had become so unexpectedly part and parcel of her life.

To whom should she turn for comfort, sympathy, and guidance, if not to Mr. Ross, as she called him?

Ulmont reassured her with the kindest of words:

"It will only be for a day or so, Izetta," he said, "before I can take you home."

"You wish to ask your mother if you may bring me home?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied frankly; "I believe it to be my duty to consult her first in regard to the matter."

"What if she should refuse," she questioned in a low voice, "what would become of me—what should I do?"

"She will not refuse," he answered, "when I explain to her the vow which I have made to protect you, and tell her your sorrowful history."

"Do you think your mother will learn to love me, Mr. Ross?"

The simple question startled him.

"I do not see how she can help loving you," he replied, gazing down into the girl's eloquent face, mentally thinking she little knew into what good hands her fate had drifted her. He released himself gently from her clinging hands.

"I had not thought you would be so sorry to lose me for so short a time," he said, gently."

He gazed earnestly at the sweet, white face that was raised to his, changing eloquently with every emotion.

"You will not stay away long, Mr. Ross," she asked, in a low voice: "oh, Mr. Ross, what should I do without you, how should I bear my lonely life? I should die if you did not come back. I have not one friend on all the wide, wide earth but you—since—since——"

"You must not worry yourself with such thoughts, Izetta, I have given my word, I will never break it. You must from this time forth look upon me as your best and truest friend—your brother!"

He was very enthusiastic at that moment; he quite meant what he said.

He had intended speaking of Loraine, yet he could not bring himself to mention her—his proud, peerless Loraine—to the timid young creature who he was certain would be in such awe of her.

After all, as he gazed at the beautiful, trusting, clinging little creature at his side, he could not feel so very sorry he had undertaken the responsibility of her future.

He was only anxious as to how his mother and Loraine would receive the strange intelligence.

Just as the sun was setting behind the western hills, flushing the sky a rosy red, Ulmont and Izetta were making their way up the straggling, moss-grown street to the heart of the little seaport town of Sussex, which was but little over a day's journey from his destination; yet Ulmont had never been in that locality before.

There was not a more picturesque spot to be found, with its quaint old square-towered churches, over which the ivy twined in long, trailing sprays, and in which the twittering sparrows built their nests.

A little purling brook leaped from the green hills, that raised their towering heads in the distance, while beyond the white stretch of beach that led to the sea, were the peaceful meadows filled with flowers, upon which the sun shone, with the blackbird and the robin swaying to and fro on the blossoming peach trees.

"Oh, Mr. Ross," cried the girl, a glad flush creeping into her face, "I never knew, I never dreamed America could be one half so fair as this!"

They passed up the moss-grown street, which led to the

only tavern in the place. A long, low, old-fashioned structure, with a wide porch in front shaded by stately elms.

Into a wide parlor, overlooking a thrifty garden, they were ushered.

The floor, dark and polished, was covered with bright-hued rugs, while the chintz-covered settees and low willow rockers, placed here and there, gave the room an exceedingly comfortable and home-like aspect.

Ulmont went in search of the landlord while Izetta sank into a seat, not observing the bustling little woman in the dark gingham gown and white frilled cap, whose sharp, twinkling gray eyes were regarding her steadfastly from across the room.

"She does not look like a married woman," mentally commented Mrs. Bruce. "I must know more of her before she finds shelter here. You and your husband have come quite a distance, I should judge," she said, aloud.

Izetta turned in surprise; she had imagined herself quite alone; she saw a woman's face turned kindly toward her.

No woman's voice had spoken to her since she had bid farewell to Italy.

Izetta longed to cross to where the speaker sat, fling herself on the low footstool beside her, and tell her of the great sorrow that had come upon her in the death of the only being to whom she was bound by a kindred tie in all the wide world.

How little the child knew of the pitiless, relentless world, or its intriguing people!

She had longed, hungered, for a woman's gentle words and kindly sympathy; great tears rose in Izetta's eyes as she answered simply, yet with the candor of a child:

"Mr. Ross is not my husband, madam."

"Perhaps your brother, then?" queried Mrs. Bruce.

"I have had a great sorrow, madam," said Izetta, mournfully, tears filling her large, dark eyes; "a sorrow so great I have wondered since that I had not died with the shock. I had neither father nor mother—I had no one to whom I could turn for sympathy. Mr. Ross was so kind to me—I do not know what would become of me if I were to lose Mr. Ross. I am quite alone now, only for him."

The dark frown deepened on Mrs. Bruce's comely face.

"Do you mean to say the young man who brought you here is quite a stranger to you?" she asked, sharply and interrogatively.

"Yes," answered Izetta, simply, "we came over from Italy on the steamer *White Cresson*."

She wondered why, in one short moment, the speaker's voice had grown so bitter and so hard.

Izetta's answer had quite convicted her in the eyes of the bustling housewife, whose face had grown white with rage.

From the open window where she sat she had heard Ulmont ask her husband if his companion might find shelter at the inn during his absence of a few days.

"Money was no object," he said, "if she were only comfortable."

Ulmont had pressed a purse so filled with gold into his hand, he fairly took the landlord's breath away; and he had looked at the handsome, courteous, impatient stranger, wondering what it could all mean, while his wife, closely observing all from the window, mentally concluded all was not right with them; and she said to herself, if the handsome stranger left the young girl there, she would doubtless never look upon his face again.

Mrs. Bruce had passed many a year at the inn, and had seen many pitiful scenes. She had said to herself:

"He is tired of the girl, he wishes to abandon her, if she is not his wife."

Then she had turned to Izetta, whose simple candor had confirmed her worst suspicions.

At that moment Ulmont entered the cool, shadowy parlor, bowing to the lady present, and holding out both hands to Izetta.

His quick perception told him there was something amiss between Izetta and the landlady, as such he judged her rightly to be.

Mrs. Bruce turned sharply toward him.

"You are a gentleman," she said, "bred and born. I know blue blood when I see it, and I say there is a mystery here between yourself and this young creature, scarcely more than a child, who confesses she is not your wife, yet you have crossed the seas together. We are poor people, here, sir, but we are honest ones. I have daughters grown of my own. We care not for your gold; the Sussex Inn shall never harbor even the shadow of wrong-doing while Esther Bruce lives. Food you may have in plenty, but not shelter. No, not for a single night!"

In vain Ulmont bent his haughty pride to explain the circumstances which surrounded this peculiar case; the inflexible woman was deaf to his words.

"I had no intention of stopping myself," he expostulated; "I take the boat lying down at the wharf which leaves in half an hour."

The landlady looked at him with gathering scorn in her eyes.

"A very pretty story," she said, ironically, "when the boat left quite half an hour ago."

Ulmont Ulvesford staggered back as though a heavy blow had been suddenly dealt him.

Lurid flashes of light seemed gleaming before his eyes; the hissing voice falling sharply on his senses seemed to flaunt back the words:

"The boat has left!"

With trembling hands he hurriedly consulted his watch —it was indeed too true; he had loitered too long: the darkness of night was gathering sullenly around them, and Izetta was refused shelter at the inn because she was not his wife!

For himself he cared not; then and not until then did the full realization of his exact position strike him forcibly.

How was he to keep the terrible vow forced upon him, when failure beset him at the very outset?

How little they thought that one incident would reap such a harvest of woe.

Had Ulmont found shelter for the young orphan at the inn, the seeds of the bitterest of follies would never have been sown.

CHAPTER III.

AT HIS MERCY.

An hour later, two figures stood on the white pebbled beach watching intently the approaching steamer, whose headlights, each moment growing nearer, glowed like bright stars against the dark, overhanging background of clouds.

The moonbeams fell clear and bright upon them, casting weird, gigantic shadows on the white beach; the low winds moaned as they stirred the blossoming trees, and the waves dismally beat against the shore.

Ulmont Ulvesford was lost in a deep reverie, as he stood there impatiently watching the incoming steamer, scarcely heeding the silent little figure watching every expression that crossed his face, who stood by his side.

"But for this unfortunate affair, I should have been almost at Boston," he told himself.

The arrival of the steamer was so uncertain, they would not expect him until the following week.

He had intended surprising them by arriving a week sooner, but now the suprise would take quite another form.

How his friends would laugh at his sorry plight if they were to see him now—he, an Ulvesford, heir that

fore the rector; surely, he of all people could advise him what course to pursue.

He was sorely perplexed; he quite shrank from the thought of taking Izetta to his haughty mother; the conviction was growing stronger upon him each moment, that he dared not until he had first consulted her.

"I trust you will not wrong me in your thoughts, my dear Mr. Illingsworth," he said, proudly, "until I have had the opportunity of explaining how strangely this poor child was placed in my care."

The rector took the proffered seat he indicated.

Izetta nestled closer to Ulmont's side, thoughtlessly, confidingly, as a child might have done, as he repeated to this stranger her sorrowful story.

There were tears in Mr. Illingsworth's eyes as he finished the narrative.

"I don't see how you can take her to your home knowing your mother as well as I do, without preparing the way for her," said the rector, decidedly, shaking his head. "Could you not leave her with some of your friends for a few days, at least?"

"That is a point which I have myself been trying to decide. I confess I was never so sorely puzzled. I had preferred leaving her for a short time with strangers. I had not desired my friends to know of the affair. My experience at Sussex makes me doubtful of success. No one would receive this innocent child, money was no inducement, simply because she was not my wife."

"Precisely," answered the rector; "you do not realize how a curious world receives this story, which seems more like a romance than a sad reality; truths are stranger than fiction, yet often unbelieved. Poor child," he added sadly, patting Izetta's dark curls, "the poor boy means well by you, but Heaven alone knows the bitter scorn and weary heartaches you will have to endure alone and unprotected."

"Not so," answered Ulmont, quickly, "I am her protector. Have I not made the most solemn vow man can make to stand between this helpless orphan and the cold world, and I certainly mean to fulfill it."

"You could only have protected her fully from the world's storms in one way."

"And that?" asked Ulmont, a strange, indefinable feeling creeping over him.

"As your wife," answered the rector, gravely. "You have wealth, youth, and beauty, Ulmont; I can foresee how this will end. This child will learn to love you, you will be her world, her all; but hark you, as you value the honor of your race, an honor never tarnished, as you deal by this hapless orphan Heaven will deal with you. You have

always been wayward from boyhood up, but I shall believe your heart is pure and spotless. Never forget the future welfare of this trusting orphan lies at your door—she is at your mercy."

The Reverend Paul Illingsworth spoke rapidly, vehemently.

Ulmont Ulvesford rose to his feet, pacing rapidly to and fro.

The eloquent appeal of the rector filled him with strange thoughts, he stopped suddenly before him, his proud head tossed back, his dark-brown, waving hair pushed back from his forehead in careless disorder.

Scarcely two minutes before he spoke, the idea had not crossed his mind; and when he looked back at that moment in after years, it almost seemed to him that another voice had spoken with his lips.

His honor was touched, his pride wounded.

"Mr. Illingsworth," he said, calmly, "I have resolved upon Izetta's future."

His brave voice never faltered as he continued:

"I have determined she shall be my wife; see how she clings to me," he cried. "I have sworn to protect her. I can and I will as my wife."

He had quite forgotten the beautiful, golden-haired young girl who awaited his coming, the peerless, proud young beauty who was to have been his wife in one short week.

In one brief instant the recklessness of his impulsive nature asserted itself; he forgot the warning face of his mother and of his promised bride; he thought only of the present difficulties and of a way out of them by which he could keep his vow to the very letter.

How strange it was, in that terrible moment not one thought of Loraine crossed his mind.

"Mr. Illingsworth," he continued; "you must help me—you must marry us."

"You cannot be serious," replied the pastor; "besides you are too young to think of marrying yet."

"I am of age to-day," continued Ulmont; "one ought certainly to be able to think for themselves at that age, they are men not boys. I am terribly in earnest, I assure you."

Persuasion was useless; the one great evil—self-will—which had been sown in his breast in infancy, would brook no opposition.

He quite forgot what was due to his mother, to Loraine; forgot what was due to the honor of his race. He only saw in his rashness a way which should compel the world to respect and honor the poor young orphan

whom they had turned from their doors because she was not his wife.

The rector was sorely discomforted; he was too wise to openly thwart the young heir, yet he begged him "not to be too rash, to take time to consider so important a step."

An angry flush rose to Ulmont's face, but he controlled his impatience.

"I shall make the request but once, Mr, Illingsworth. If you refuse me, you may perhaps rue it all your life."

The rector wondered if he did not refuse him, if he would not be more apt to rue it; he was irritated at Ulmont's recklessness and utter folly, while he was forced to admire the young heir's honor and courage.

Izetta, as she listened, was conscious of but one thought —she was not to lose Mr. Ross—they were settling her future; she was not to lose the handsome, sympathetic young friend, who seemed brighter to her than the sunshine.

Izetta had been born under the warm, bright, sunny skies of Italy: she had imbibed the warm, bright, passionate heart of its people; such natures as Izetta's were not slow to feel the mystic power of love. Yet she had never once dreamed of it.

How was she to understand that the bright, swift love of a lifetime, the one great crown of womanhood, was slowly but surely engulfing her?

The bright, dreamy years of her childhood lay far back in the past.

Izetta Rienzi stood on the borderland of womanhood as her hands clasped Ulmont's while he explained to her in the fervor of his eloquent fancy that she must be his wife.

"Is there nothing which can shake your purpose?" asked the rector in despair.

"Nothing," answered Ulmont, decisively.

Again they stood upon the silent deck, quite deserted now, save by these three. Again the pale moon looked down upon a tragic picture.

The fleecy clouds, like a white hand, seemed to warn them. A star or two fell from the heavens, leaving long trails of phosphorescent light against the blue sky.

The green waves dashed their white foam like a restless spirit against the swaying steamer.

Was it a dream? Izetta almost fancied the wild, dashing waves were singing a requiem, murmuring, oh, so sadly in their song:

"Be warned—be warned!"

In all her after life, she could always hear in the murmuring of the waves that one, sad voice, whispering:

"Be warned—be warned!"

Now, she was only conscious of handsome Mr. Ross holding her hands tightly, while the minister of God impressively performed the marriage ceremony; she had but a confused remembrance of the words he was saying, as she made her responses.

At last it was over, and the hands of the rector were laid upon her head in fervent blessing.

Surely there was never so strange a wedding as this.

A few rain drops fell from the darkening heavens—Izetta always thought they were angels' tears—and the stars died out of the sky.

If those silent waves could only have whispered to her of the woful secret, which, from this night's work, was to darken her young life, she would have cast herself then and there in their cold embrace, and been gathered to happiness and rest in their bosom.

CHAPTER IV.

REPENTED AT LEISURE.

THE week that followed seemed like a strange dream to Izetta.

Those who saw the young gentleman and his beautiful, clinging girl-wife wondered at them.

There was a world of passionate love in the girl's dark eyes; everyone could see she lived on his words and glances; her sweet, foreign face told its own story. A child no longer—love had made her a woman, devoted and tender, as the genial sunshine expands the bud into the rose.

Her husband made little pretense of affection, yet it was not in human nature to be wholly blind to the ardent love that glowed in that beautiful face.

Ulmont was beginning to realize that the love which the Reverend Paul Illingsworth had predicted was coming to his young wife; he had yet to learn its depths. He never dreamed the one great thought that filled Izetta's soul was:

"I love Alderic so dearly, so deeply, he *must* love me in return."

The week had hardly passed ere Ulmont repented most bitterly what he had done; it was a sad fact, yet too terribly true, he told himself.

The vow which had been extorted from him had cost him a terrible price.

How should he meet Loraine, who was his betrothed bride, and tell her what he had done? What excuse could he offer to atone for her outraged pride? He knew Loraine

loved him deeply in her cold, proud way; he knew how she would come forth to meet him, a flush on her beautiful face, and with the love-light in her eyes; his ring—the ring with which they had plighted their troth—sparkling on her little, white hand; how the light would die out of her beautiful eyes when he told her what he had done.

She could easily see he had not married for love, he told himself; he had been forced into it through duty; still, the fatal work had been done—he was securely married.

Brave as the young man was, he had not the courage to face his stern, haughty mother; he would not have flinched in the foremost of a battle, with shot and shell falling thickly about him, yet he did shrink from the fury that would gather in his mother's eyes when he spoke the words which were beginning to gall like wormwood on his lips—he was married. If it had been Loraine, proud, peerless, and self-possessed, how different it would all have been.

If he chanced to meet a maiden with golden hair, his heart almost ceased to beat, and the name Loraine would spring unconsciously to his lips.

If he saw a handsome, graceful woman, whom everyone universally admired, or heard her silvery laughter, he would remain silent for long hours, thinking how blind and rash he had been; thus his impulsive recklessness struck home to his heart at last.

It was a strange bridal week.

Ulmont treated his young wife gently, considerately, but in his own heart he cried out:

"This marriage was a great mistake!"

The young heir of the Ulvesford Mines told himself he was wretchedly unhappy; yet all of his future years must pay the price of one moment's impulsiveness.

There was no one to blame but himself. He fully resolved, however, that Izetta should not suffer for it.

One bright, sunlit morning, toward the close of that eventful week, Ulmont asked Izetta if she would like to take a ramble by the seashore; the sun was lighting the water with a thousand arrowy sparkles, and the air was vigorous and exhilarating, with a sweet perfume, as if each zephyr were laden with the aroma of the distant spice-groves and myriads of blossoms over which it had lately lingered.

Izetta looked up into his face with glad, shining eyes.

"I should be so pleased to go, Mr. Ross," she said.

How she longed to call him husband, but Ulmont's proud, haughty face invited little familiarity.

He had grown quite used to the title; indeed, it had never struck him as strange his beautiful young wife should call him Mr. Ross.

Woman-like, Izetta had donned her prettiest robes, of which he had purchased her quite a supply, to please him. Ulmont had been simply surprised at the great difference dress could make in her.

In her plain dark dress and crimson cloak he had thought of her as a child, yet he was forced to admit she was a beautiful young girl in the soft, dark plush traveling-dress she wore, which fitted her so perfectly; yet, after the first surprise, he quite forgot to notice her appearance at all.

For quite an hour they promenaded the beach in utter silence; those who passed them wondered why the young man's face was turned so persistently away from the beautiful, foreign face that was raised so wistfully toward his own; they wondered why he looked far out over the sea and sighed.

Izetta never attempted to converse with him, being only too content to answer his questions if he chanced to address her.

She often saw him take from his pocket a packet of letters, tied by a dainty, pale-blue ribbon; some of them were old and worn, as if by many perusals, and once she was quite sure she saw him gazing long and earnestly at a lock of golden hair, which he replaced with the letters in his breast-pocket.

Then, for the first time during the short week of her marriage, she addressed him voluntarily:

"Do you like golden hair very much, Alderic?" she asked, wistfully.

For a brief instant Ulmont quite forgot it was his dark-haired wife who asked the question, as he answered, enthusiastically:

"It is the most glorious of all the crowns of womanhood."

Ulmont never dreamed that Izetta was wondering why God made her own curls so dark, with a deep pain in her heart, while her handsome young husband admired fair, shining hair.

"I will show you, Izetta," he said, "how gloriously shimmering golden hair can crown a beautiful face."

As he spoke he drew from his pocket a pearl case, half hidden in its bed of purple velvet. Izetta silently took the picture from his hand.

"I warn you not to be enraptured," he laughed. "*I* am the artist, so you see it is by no means what it should have been; the subject, though, is worthy of the grandest masters."

Izetta gazed long and earnestly at the picture, drinking in every detail of that exquisitely perfect face.

A strange, numb feeling stole over her.

She was to remember it all with vivid distinctness in after years.

The picture was certainly a strange one—half reality, half ideal.

A graceful, tall, white lily was represented on the polished ivory, quite in the center of a vase of rare exotics, while upon its snowy petal was the rarest face Izetta had ever gazed upon.

A face pure and spiritual, yet blended with the coldest pride, from the perfect, arched brows to the delicate curves of the smiling, sensitive mouth, so like a cleft, deep crimson rose-leaf.

The eyes were a large, deep, expressive blue, the face was perfect in contour and dainty coloring, crowned in a halo of golden hair, long and curling, which mingled with the lily's golden calyx.

Beneath was written in fanciful design, "My love."

Izetta scarcely knew how long she gazed at it. Ulmont interrupted her.

"You are pleased with my fancy?" he said, gently.

"This is your ideal of love, Alderic," she said, softly; "it is very beautiful, yet is only a picture from your imagination, is it not, Alderic?"

The flush deepened on Ulmont's face as he answered, evasively:

"I have seen such a picture; it was one of a few choice ones in a private collection. I painted it quite from memory."

"It must have impressed you strongly, Alderic."

"So it did," he replied, carelessly enough.

How little she knew every lineament of that beautiful face, of which Loraine Lorrimer was the original, was stamped indelibly on his heart.

The great wonder was, how was he ever to learn to forget her? Izetta's hand trembled as she handed the portrait back to her husband.

Was it fate that caused the handsome case to drop from her nervous fingers upon the sharp crags at her feet? She uttered a startled cry.

There was but little damage done; the face was uninjured, only a portion of one of the corners was broken off, which fell into her hand as she stooped to recover it.

Izetta could not just then account for the sudden impulse that led her to preserve that little jagged edge of pearl so carefully; perhaps because it had belonged to something her husband had prized; it had lain in his hands; his eyes had gazed upon it.

Ulmont was quite amused at the grieved face turned toward him.

"I hope you will forgive me, Alderic," she said; "I have spoiled your beautiful portrait, your pretty love."

How little Izetta realized the vital truth of her words Ah! she *had* spoiled his love, and his life; yet he laughed gayly at her sorrow. Of course he was sorry, too, but mistakes would happen; there was no help for them.

Ulmont laughed as he noted how a few pleasant words had brought back the sunshine to her eyes.

She came up closer to him and laid her hand timidly on his arm.

"Do you think, Alderic," she asked, simply as a child might have done, "your ideal of love is prettier than I? You had not seen *me* then."

The very candor of the question amazed him. Looking down into those starry eyes, he, so chivalrous to all women, how could he help telling her evasively that *her* face, above all others, was the most beautiful in the world?

As he looked down upon her he wondered if, after all, there was ever any possibility of his becoming really interested in his fair young wife.

At that moment a sudden impulse seized him to throw the portrait far out into the sea and the letters after it.

What right had he, now that he was bound to another, to dream of the fair face of Loraine Lorrimer, or to gaze ruefully upon the pictured face?

Had Ulmont, for once in his life, obeyed the sudden impulse that sprang from his heart, the greatest tragedy of his life would have been spared him.

The grand old name and honor of Ulvesford, which the young heir would have shielded with his life, would never have been dragged through the mire of dishonor, and this story would never have been written.

Then a strange event happened.

When Ulmont had parted from the rector, he had asked, as a special favor, that the Reverend Illingsworth should, upon his arrival at Boston, call immediately on his mother.

Ulmont knew that the rector, above all others, was the one best fitted to break the news of her son's marriage to the stern, cold woman, who never forgot nor forgave an injury.

If she would pardon him and receive Izetta as his wife Ulmont had decided to return home at once: that was the message he sent her, which the strange workings of fate destined she should never receive.

It happened in this wise:

Ulmont had desired the rector to let him know at once

the result of this interview, directing his communication to a small station at the cross-road, which they should reach late in the week.

If favorable, he could take Izetta direct to Boston, if not he could take her for the present to his old nurse at Silvernook, who would receive her with open arms for *his* sake.

He hoped when his haughty mother saw remonstrance was useless and regrets vain, the principal difficulty would be removed.

When they reached the station at the cross-roads, Ulmont received a note which quite unmanned him.

A letter dated two days previous, hastily written, awaited him, which was as fellows:

"Boston, Thursday morning—MY DEAR BOY:—if you would see your mother alive hasten home at once or you may be too late. I found her in so feeble a condition, fearing the slightest shock might prove fatal, I dared not broach the subject of your marriage. Leave your wife there until the crisis is past. I will be at each train to meet you. Your faithful friend,

"PAUL ILLINGSWORTH."

Again Ulmont made the mistake of his life by not confiding fully and unreservedly in his young wife.

In ten minutes the train started for Silvernook; five minutes later he could catch the express direct to Boston. He had not a minute to lose.

He hurriedly explained to Izetta, as he thought, all that was necessary for her to know at present. His mother lay ill, perhaps dying, he must go to her at once, while she must go on alone to Silvernook, which was fortunately but an hour's ride.

He would give her a note to his old nurse, whom she could readily find, who would receive her kindly until he came for her, which would certainly be within the following week.

Ulmont hastily tore a leaf from his memorandum, wrote a short note which he addressed and placed in her hand, together with the little package containing the money her grandfather had left her, and two hundred dollars which he happened to have by him.

It was all so sudden.

Izetta struggled hard to bravely bear the separation from the husband whom she so madly worshiped. The next moment found her alone on the train.

Ulmont watched long and earnestly till she was quite out of sight, the sweet, tear-stained face pressed close against the window-pane.

His heart gave a great throb.

"Was it possible," he asked himself, "he was learning to love his young wife after all?"

Izetta's face haunted him during all of his journey home; he quite wished she was by his side again.

How little Ulmont Ulvesford dreamed under what pitiful circumstances he should look upon her face again.

CHAPTER V.

AN EXPECTANT BRIDE.

In the midst of a green and grassy lawn, thickly studded here and there with towering elms and stately beech trees, stood a gray-stone structure, half hidden from the main road by creeping vines and intervening shrubbery; its moss-grown turrets and gabled roof towering toward the sunshine—this was Lorrimer Place, one of the finest old mansions to be found in the suburbs of Boston.

The spacious grounds which surrounded it were a model of artistic beauty, from the miniature lakes on which the graceful, white-necked swans glided to and fro, to the marble statuary half hidden by the rare, dense foliage, and rose-covered arbors which extended to the thickly-wooded glen which lay beyond.

At one of the windows, from which the heavy, amber satin curtains were looped back, stood Loraine Lorrimer, the heiress.

The golden sunshine never lingered upon a fairer picture than she made in her morning dress of creamy lace, which fell in graceful folds about her perfect figure; she looked what she was—a queenly young girl, one born to command.

There were pride, poetry and passion, blended in each glance of her blue, flashing eyes, her face in its haughty, charming repose, was simply a perfect one, from which her long, golden hair was pushed carelessly back, a spray of white heath in its golden waves, fastened with a diamond arrow.

A magnificent solitaire gleamed upon her finger, on which her eyes often rested.

At last she turned from the window, with a slight shade of disappointment on her face.

"I had quite expected a letter from Ulmont," she said meditatively. "I am surprised at not having some kind of a message from him."

Her mother, who reclined on an adjacent divan, closed the book she held in her lap, with a smile, as she replied:

"Ulmont may count himself lucky if he reaches here by to-morrow. You must not forget, my dear Loraine,

how very uncertain the arrival of these steamers are nowadays. Young people are always impatient. I never see a young, expectant bride, without thinking of the day before my *own* wedding."

"Did you feel a strange, happy restlessness that you could scarcely explain, mamma?" asked Loraine, blushing rosily, seating herself on a low hassock at her feet.

"Yes, and I was much like you, never quite satisfied unless I was at the window, watching for the coming of my lover."

The rose bloom deepened on Loraine Lorrimer's flower-like face.

"You are mistaken, there, mamma," she said. "I do not expect him until the eventful to-morrow."

As she spoke, she thought of the closing sentence of the last letter she had received from him; he had written:

"I shall be at Lorrimer Place by the 15th inst., positively, to claim for my bride, the sweetest, fairest girl in all the wide, wide world. My sweet Loraine, time nor tide could e'er withhold me."

The superb *trousseau* a princess might have been proud of, had arrived the day before; then Loraine had done a foolish thing; she had arrayed herself in the shimmering gossamer robes to note the effect; even clasped the pearls around her perfect neck and arms, and fastened the veil to her golden hair, smiling proudly the while, as she thought how pleased her handsome young lover would be with her.

As Loraine stood there an event happened, which, though trifling in itself, caused her a strange sensation.

She had gone to her jewel-case to consult her watch.

"How strange," she said to herself, as she took it in her hand. "It has stopped!"

It wanted twenty minutes to eight. Loraine gathered up her bridal robes about her, stepping out into the corridor, to where the huge old clock ticked away the hours; her heart almost ceased to beat—*the pendulum stood still*, watch and clock, as if by common consent, had stopped on the self-same moment—twenty minutes to eight.

Loraine hastily re-entered her *boudoir;* she was not superstitious, yet she could not help but remember the story she had often heard, how that same old clock had stopped on the eve preceding some great, sorrowful family event. Still she did not like to remember old traditions on the eve before her wedding-day.

Pretty young bridesmaids had taken full possession of the hall. "Everything should be in perfect readiness on the morrow," they said.

The bride-cake had arrived, and was really a work of art in its way.

Merry peals of laughter filled the corridors and spacious rooms, as nimble fingers fashioned the great pillars of roses.

"One wedding makes many." More than one maiden secretly hoped that some faint-hearted lover would take courage, under the mystic influence of the occasion, and who knew but their own wedding-night might be the next to follow?

Full many a happy thought was twined among those roses, those sweet, fragrant roses, that could keep their own secrets.

Mrs. Lorrimer gazed upon her daughter with all a mother's fond pride.

"You are so peerlessly beautiful, Loraine," she said, caressing the young girl's bright, golden hair. "You might have married a duke or prince, yet you have chosen love. You have wealth, beauty and love; truly your lines have fallen in pleasant places.'"

She kissed her daughter's upturned face and left the room, leaving Loraine alone with her own happy reflections.

At that moment Katy, the maid, appeared at the door.

"If you please, Miss Loraine," she said, "there is a person down-stairs who insists upon seeing you, although I told him you gave the strictest orders that no stranger should be admitted."

"Did he give you no card, or state his business?" asked Loraine, surprisedly.

"Card! oh, no," answered the maid, with a slight grimace. "He is down in the servants' hall and refuses to give his name."

"That's strange," murmured the heiress, reflectively, thinking perhaps it was some poor tenant, or a former recipient of her generous bounty; for Loraine was as capricious and generous as she was haughty and beautiful.

"What kind of a looking person is he, Katy?"

"A dark, swarthy man," answered the maid, promptly, "with a long, dark beard, and the sharpest, cruelest, and blackest of eyes, over which his bushy eyebrows meet in a straight line across his face, and he has the whitest of teeth, and, indeed, he scarcely reaches to my shoulder—he is a dwarf."

"It is Vatal, the dwarf," gasped Loraine, sinking back in affright in her seat. "Quick, quick, Katy," she cried, "bar the doors against him, fasten him out; let him not gain even so much as a foothold in the hall; quick, or you may be too late!"

As the maid sped quickly to do her bidding, Loraine hid her face in her white, jeweled hands.

"Vatal's visit seems the forerunner of some impending evil," she muttered. "Is some cruel blow about to fall upon me? I cannot, I will not, believe it. I wonder what could have brought him here, the day before my wedding?"

A dark shadow fell between her and the sunshine, lingering for a moment only on the opposite wall, upon which her eyes were fastened. Loraine knew full well it was the shadow of Vatal, the dwarf.

The fair young heiress little dreamed the enraged dwarf was at that moment shaking his finger back at her as he muttered:

"You have had your fate in your own hands to-day—I might have saved you and yours, but you scorned my words, barred me from your door—proud daughter of a proud race, go blindly on to your fate!"

The next morning broke clear and bright, no bride ever looked out upon a fairer wedding-morning. No cloud was in the blue, smiling heavens; all nature seemed striving its best to put forth its beauty.

Even the little robins poured forth their sweetest melody, as though they were singing their hearts out in their song, as they gazed up at the fair, happy face at the window with their little, bright eyes, while they dashed their wings in the fountain's spray.

"How bright love makes the world," laughed Loraine; "ah! who has so handsome a lover as I!"

She hid her face in a bouquet of fragrant blossoms.

"My darling," she whispered softly to herself, "how I have counted the long days of the year that have passed! Ah, Ulmont, my love, after a few more hours, nothing can separate us!"

She wondered why the word came questioningly back upon her heart. Nothing?

Those who saw Loraine Lorrimer that day wondered at her intense happiness, her brilliancy and wit, as she flitted here and there, a merry group of laughing maidens following after, fluttering and chirping like robins in the bright, gay spring-time.

Everyone was sure Loraine would make the most peerless bride that ever was seen.

At last everything was in perfect readiness; the last touches had been put to the great columns of roses and the fern-bordered, scented fountains, over which a thousand mellow lights twinkled from the grand chandeliers.

The magnificent repast had been laid, and in the spacious parlors the guests were already beginning to assemble.

* * * * * * *

As the train, bearing Ulmont Ulvesford neared Boston,

a close carriage drawn by a pair of dark horses was moving slowly along the high, narrow road, but a few miles distant from Ulmont's home.

As they reached a narrow, abrupt turn in the road, one of the two occupants of the carriage touched his companion lightly on the shoulder.

"This must be the spot, Vatal," he said slowly, "they will be sure to take the cross cut from here."

The one addressed as Vatal quietly drew rein, replying:

"No better spot could have been selected. We have everything in our favor if——"

"Hark you, Vatal," interrupted his companion, impatiently, "there must be no *ifs* and *ands* in this matter; it must be done!"

"If you did not know me so well, Heath Hampton, I might affect amusement at this needless precaution," replied the dwarf, doggedly. "Did I ever make a blunder out of anything I undertook yet? and you have given me some rather hard cases to manage."

"Hush!" muttered the other; "no more of this—it is *your* business to forget a transaction as soon as it ends. This case is of greater importance to me than all those other affairs, and one on which your lips must be forever sealed. I am a desperate man, Vatal; you know me well enough for that. Do you know how I should punish treachery?"

Heath Hampton leaned forward, and whispered just one word in the dwarf's ear, which made the other quail as if a terrible blow had been suddenly dealt him.

As Heath Hampton leaned forward, the long, dark cloak which he wore fell back from his shoulders, and through the fast gathering twilight the faultless evening dress he wore and the flashing of the jewels upon his person were easily discernible, and from beneath the heavy slouch hat which concealed a handsome, dark, desperate face, a pair of dark eyes eagerly scanned the road in the distance, which the gathering twilight was fast obscuring.

More than once he consulted his watch with growing impatience, which he held in his white, shapely fingers, as he beat a tattoo with the heel of his polished boot on the soft carriage rug.

"There can be no doubt about Ulvesford's arrival on this train—I was at the station when the rector received the telegram to that effect," he remarked, presently, continuing, as there was no response from the dwarf; "you will have close work of it, Vatal; you will have ten miles of good hard driving to Lorrimer Place—*after that.*"

"I can easily make it," answered Vatal

Then both relapsed into silence—Vatal mentally wonder-

ing which is the greater villain of the two—the one who plans a diabolical deed—or the poor wretch who executes his bidding; the one who reclines the while at his ease, or the hunted criminal—fleeing from the clutch of outraged justice.

Heath Hampton exercised a strange influence over the dwarf.

Five years before he had rescued him—an escaped convict—from the minions of the law—not for the sake of mercy, but for his own designs; he recognized in Vatal a willing tool. He had not mistaken the quality of the terrible wretch whom he held in his power.

At the moment a shriek of a far-off train fell distinctly on their ears. The poor horses, as if scenting danger, pawed the ground in fear, uttering low whinnies.

"Hold those horses, Vatal, I say!' cried Heath Hampton, with a muttered imprecation, as the poor beasts started down the road at a sharp gallop.

"I am trying my best, sir, but——"

"Out of the way!" cried Hampton, frantically, and in another instant he had leaped into the seat beside the dwarf, and grasped the reins in his firm white hands with such a powerful wrench that it brought the trembling horses quiveringly back on their haunches, to a dead standstill, panting and covered with foam.

At that instant the sound of wheels dashing along at a rapid pace over the rocky road smote upon their ears.

Heath Hampton pulled his hat further down over his face, while the terrible smile on his cruelly handsome face deepened as he called out in a low, steady voice;

"Swerve suddenly to the right, remember."

CHAPTER VI.

THE HEIRESS.

"No spirit so gay, but recalls the hour
When it learned what all must know;
That, enshrined in every human heart,
Lies the mystery of woe."

In the spacious parlors of Lorrimer Place, the guests were already beginning to assemble; this was to be a gala night; a festive occasion long to be remembered the whole country around.

Loraine was seated in her *boudoir*, while Katy, her maid, was putting the finishing touches to her exquisite toilet—and a most beautiful bride she made.

The long mirror reflected a tall, graceful, willowy figure, draped in shimmering white satin and rich old lace. Dia-

monds and pearls gleamed on her snowy breast, and in the meshes of her golden hair.

The long, sweeping veil, like a misty cloud, and the coronet of orange blossoms became her fair beauty exceedingly. Never had Loraine's beauty shone out so brilliantly as on this, her wedding night.

A minister from New York had arrived to perform the ceremony. The merry laughter of the throng of guests floated up to Loraine where she sat.

"There!" cried Katy, taking a step or two back to admire her work; "you are just simply perfect. I shall never forget you, Miss Loraine, as you look to-night; but a slight touch of *rouge* on your cheeks wouldn't come amiss—you are just the least trifle too pale—you look like a marble statue."

"I hope Ulmont will share in your enthusiasm," replied Loraine smilingly; "I believe I *do* look a little pale; to tell the truth I am feeling just a little nervous; it is time Ulmont was here; and he will be sure to want to see me before we go down to the parlors."

"He will be in raptures when he does see you, miss."

"I hope so, Katy," replied Loraine, gently. "If I please *him* I am content."

The little ormolu clock on the mantel chimed the hour of seven. Loraine started, with a little cry of surprise.

"I did not dream it was half so late," she said. "Ulmont should be here by this time—he *is* probably here, enjoying his last bachelor cigar out on the lawn."

Time does not linger long with the present, and the moments flew with quick, winged feet.

Loraine sat idly on a divan, tapping her little slippered foot on the thick velvet carpet, expecting each moment a summons from her lover, but the moments dragged themselves slowly by, yet no summons came.

She glanced up nervously at the clock; it wanted a quarter of eight, and yet there was no message for her.

Joyous mirth below was at its height; she could hear the rippling music mingled with the sound of fresh young voices.

Her face flushed and paled. Suddenly the memory of a story she had once read, of a bridegroom who came not, came slowly back to her on this her wedding-night.

"What if anything were to happen?" she asked herself.

"Katy, slip down-stairs and see if Mr. Ulvesford has yet arrived."

Katy hastened to do her bidding, muttering to herself:

"I wouldn't give much for a man who was not prompt on his wedding-night."

Down-stairs she went, searching vigorously everywhere,

but Ulmont Ulvesford was nowhere to be found. She came slowly back with a troubled face, and reported her non-success.

Loraine Lorrimer was growing extremely nervous; twice her mother had anxiously come to see what was the cause of the delay; but Loraine had begged her to go down among the guests.

"Ulmont *must* be here very soon," she said; "leave me alone, mamma."

A gentle knock sounded on the door, and to Loraine's glad "come in," the minister entered.

She started back; she had been so sure it was Ulmont.

"My dear," he said gently, "our friends are getting quite impatient; I have been making inquiries for Mr. Ulvesford, but he has not yet arrived."

"Oh, he must come soon," sobbed Loraine, her heart fluttering strangely, while a nameless dread and strange foreboding crept over her.

Silently the minister seated himself on the divan beside her, taking her small, white hand, with perhaps some such thought in his mind as had crossed the maid's, yet he gave no expression in words to his thoughts.

"Ulmont should certainly be here by this time," said Loraine, striving to speak calmly.

"Patience, my dear, patience," replied the minister, patting gently the little hand that now lay nervously in her lap, "although I do not wonder you should be a little nervous on your wedding-night; it is but natural. Still," continued he, glancing up at the clock, "it is yet early—I will go below, for I expect he has already arrived."

Saying which, he arose, and with a reassuring smile left the room.

"Katy, Katy!" she whispered, "see, it grows late; do you think anything could have happened him?"

The maid did not answer, she knew not what to say. With slow, measured chimes, that struck a strange knell in Loraine's heart, the clock on the mantel struck the hour of eight.

She arose from her seat and paced up and down the room.

Five—ten—fifteen minutes dragged themselves slowly by. Still the mirthful hum of voices floated up, as if to mock her.

"They are growing impatient," she said to herself, as she drew aside the curtain from the window, and gazed anxiously down the road.

The moon shone brilliantly; every object was discernible—she saw nothing of Ulmont Ulvesford.

Twenty minutes—a half hour, and yet another ten dragged by.

"Katy," she said, "leave the room; I want to be left alone."

As the door closed softly after her, Loraine threw herself down on a seat by the window, pressed her flushed face to the cool pane, straining her eyes eagerly down the main road.

"He has not come," she cried, wringing her hands in sharp agony. She felt bewildered; there was a strange pain in her heart, growing more intense each moment.

"Could anything have happened?"

Only the echo of her own voice answered her.

Again there was a knock at the door; this time it was a servant.

"Has Mr. Ulvesford yet arrived?" asked Loraine, eagerly scanning the girl's face.

"No, ma'am, but the minister and your ma says may they come up again and talk with you?"

"No, no, no!" groaned Loraine, pitifully, throwing herself down on the divan and burying her face in the cushions. "I don't want to see anyone. I want to be left alone. Do you understand—all alone."

The girl quietly withdrew from the room. There was a strange hush in the voices down below.

"Oh, he must have come," she said.

With bated breath she opened the door of her *boudoir* slightly, and listened.

The conversation of the guests below was plainly audible.

The words of a young lady, seeming to come from close proximity, caught her attention. They seemed to have been shrieked on the air, caught up and muttered on every breeze; they were simple words, jestingly spoken, yet they "hit a mark the archer little meant." It was a young, careless voice that spoke them, but each word pierced Loraine's heart like a sharp dagger.

"I do not think the bridegroom is coming. Poor Loraine! What a terrible blow this must be to her; such a keen disgrace."

There seemed to be a general murmur of assent from all below.

Loraine quickly closed the door. She had heard enough. Her brain seemed on fire; her senses reeled. She drew the bolt of the door, flung herself down on the carpet, and there the beautiful, proud young heiress wept the bitterest tears that ever welled up from a human heart.

After a violent storm of grief, a calm usually follows, but it was not so in this case.

The sparkling diamond glowing upon her finger—*his ring*—maddened her with its prismatic glow; she drew it from

her finger, flinging it with all the fury of her strength into the furthermost corner of the room.

She laughed a little, low, wild laugh.

"I will fling it from me as I do his love," she cried; "tear out his image from my heart forever and ever. Yes, I say, forever and ever."

Loraine felt a wondrous, strange sensation creeping over her.

Every sob ended in a mocking laugh. The strange stillness of the house puzzled her. Queer specters danced around her, and with their long, bony fingers pointed mockingly at the white robes and bridal veil she wore. How *dared* they approach the secret of her own chamber? She flung back upon them their cruel taunts and jeers; and they in turn mocked her every look and word.

"Fools!" she cried. "Do you think *I* care? What if the whole world were gathered down-stairs, what need *I* care if they *do* know he did not come? I do not care," she sobbed, her voice growing louder and louder. "I will go down among them and be the gayest of the gay; no wit shall be more brilliant than mine.

"Yet, why are they here, all these people?" she pondered, slowly. "What do they want? I am trying hard to think, yes, to think; but my poor brain is on fire. I cannot remember why they are here. Where are my flowers and fan? But an instant ago I placed them on this table. No, they were on that stand. I do not see them in the room. Ha! Katy has taken them down-stairs."

She unbolted the door and rushed into the hall.

There were strange, hilarious laughter and burst of song heard by those below, that froze the blood in their veins; the next moment Loraine Lorrimer, the beautiful, spoiled, petted child stood among them.

Her hair was disheveled, her white veil torn and disordered. There was a strange pallor on her face; even the ripeness had faded from her lips, as she fell into a deep swoon, which mercifully preserved her reason.

At that moment, a horseman, covered with dust and foam, dashed rapidly up to the entrance gate, bearing a telegram in his hand addressed to Loraine.

The next morning the whole country round was rife with the terrible news, that had ended in a fearful tragedy, on what was to have been the marriage-day of the young heir of the Ulvesford Mines and the peerless Loraine Lorrimer, of Lorrimer Place.

He had but that day returned from abroad, so the story ran, and while *en route* to the home of his bride to be, where he was to have found his mother also in waiting, he was intercepted by a telegram urging him, if he would see

his mother alive, to come directly home. Rev. Paul Illingsworth, with a pair of the fleetest bays from the Ulvesford stables, and a driver, had met Ulmont at the train. They were last seen driving at a furious pace along the highway.

Their path lay through a high, narrow roadway overlooking the sea on one side, high, shelving rock on the other. 'Twas there the terrible tragedy had been enacted.

Two vehicles, approaching each other from opposite directions, had collided, and the carriage containing the young heir had been thrown over into the sea.

In an instant the wildest confusion had prevailed.

Horses nor vehicle, driver, nor the white, peaceful face of Paul Illingsworth, the good old rector, ever rose again.

Ulmont Ulvesford alone had been recovered. He had sustained a terrible fracture of the skull against the sharp rocks as he fell. It was hardly expected his life would last until they reached his home, some four miles distant.

While the mother called for her son, the long halls echoing with his beloved name, and fair Loraine awaited him in her bridal robes, Ulmont Ulvesford, in another part of his home, lay dying.

In the soft, solemn stillness that had fallen around those who watched by his couch, the physician bending over him had said, slowly and solemnly, as he watched critically the motionless, white face:

"His life hangs by a single thread; if he lives, his reason may be partially restored; never wholly, unless by a violent shock, which might cost him his life. If he lives at all, you must be content."

CHAPTER VII.

A FATAL CONSEQUENCE.

THERE were few dry eyes among these wedding-guests assembled as the contents of the telegram was read to them, and every heart throbbed with pity for hapless Loraine save one, who stood leaning gracefully against a marble Psyche, engaged in conversation with Mrs. Lorrimer, when Loraine had so unexpectedly appeared among them.

The dark, handsome face of Heath Hampton, for it was he, grew a shade paler as he listened to the telegram.

"Saved," he muttered, under his breath; "I do not see how it could have been possible. I have failed—ignominiously failed!"

"Did you say he was dying?" he asked, taking the telegram from Mrs. Lorrimer's nerveless fingers.

Yes, so it read; his life hung by a slender thread,

Silently the guests quitted the mansion. Heath Hampton was among the last to depart; his dark eyes roved eagerly over the stately mansion, and the magnificent grounds which surrounded it, as they lay dark and silent, bathed in the shadowy moonbeams.

"If he dies," he said to himself, "all this may yet be mine. It is worth a desperate struggle, and I mean to make it."

Of the past life of Heath Hampton but little was known. He had come with his mother to Boston some three years previously; none know from whence.

They had purchased what was afterward known as Hampton Place, and there they lived in stately, lonely splendor.

The mother was haughty, peculiar, silent and reserved, shunning all intercourse or overtures from the outside world.

The son was quite the opposite, winning and refined, with much grace of presence and courtesy of breeding.

He spent money with a lavish hand, yet one who was a keen observer of human nature could see he was utterly devoid of principle; one who only lacked the opportunity of becoming the deepest of villains; yet the cloak of hypocrisy was gathered so tightly about him, the outer world little dreamed of the inner blackness.

Heath Hampton found no difficulty in gaining ar *entree* into the most exclusive society; as is too often the case, no one thought of inquiring into his antecedents.

He had lain seige at once to the heart and hand of the pretty heiress. It had been a close tie between Ulmont Ulvesford and himself as to which was in reality the favored suitor.

There had been a time when Loraine hardly knew herself just which she liked better; when she ultimately chose Ulmont Ulvesford, all hopes of reigning as master of Lorrimer Hall fell like a house of cards around the schemer.

He had never loved the fair, haughty beauty, yet he had vowed to win her fortune, he had been resigned to accept Loraine with it.

Eagerly he watched the rapid recovery of his rival, bitterly cursing his luck. His congratulations, although being anything but sincere, had the essence of earnestness in tone and look, which, although a spurious article, readily passed for the genuine coin.

Loraine, who had rapidly recovered from her terrible shock, had taken up her place with his mother, whose illness had not proven so serious as was at first supposed, at Ulmont's bedside, and good old Doctor Nelson often re

marked his patient's rapid recovery was in a great measure due to Loraine's careful nursing.

"I never could have spared him," she would say, with a bright, happy laugh, while Ulmont answered gently:

"The life you have striven so hard to save, Loraine, shall ever be devoted to *you!*"

To Ulmont Ulvesford there seemed to exist no break in the love he had always borne to Loraine.

Mrs. Ulvesford had taken up her vigil by his bedside, refusing to be comforted; all the love of her life was centered in her handsome, only son.

Once, in his dreams, and she saw his lips move, as she bent her head, she thought she heard him whisper a sweet, fanciful name; it sounded like "Izetta."

He never uttered the name but once, and she soon forgot the incident, it was of so little import.

Slowly Ulmont Ulvesford gathered up the tangled threads of his life again; by degrees a part of the scattered past returned to him.

He remembered quite well his travels abroad, the people whom he had met, and the pleasant ocean voyage homeward as he was coming to claim his bride.

He remembered he must have passed his twenty-first birthday on the ocean. He remembered often gazing upon Loraine's portrait in the moonlight, but beyond this, Heaven help him! he remembered nothing; leaning over the rails, gazing down on the moonlit waves at midnight, was the last recollection that crossed Ulmont Ulvesford's mind.

The following events, which had so quickly followed in rapid succession—how he landed, or the slightest remembrance of the accident which had so nearly cost him his life, were entirely obliterated from his mind.

Was the past ever more to be as a sealed book to him? Alas, for the strange complications of fate, often more cruel than death.

His vow, his marriage, and the existence of his fair, young wife were swept entirely from Ulmont Ulvesford's mind.

Heaven pity him! how should he ever know of them again?

The only one who could have pierced the darkness of that benighted brain, and whispered to him of the broken-hearted young wife who waited in vain for his coming, was good old Paul Illingsworth, and with him every memento of that brief, strange past was swept entirely from the face of the earth.

Owing to Ulmont's strong constitution, his convalescence was more rapid than might have been expected. He

was amazed when they told him the fall and winter had passed away, and spring had come once more. Everyone was so pleased to greet the young heir again.

"It was quite worth his illness to see how much people cared for him," he said, with a gay laugh.

He was the same happy, careless, debonair fellow as of old; he was changed only in appearance, yet that change was wonderful—his most intimate friends were amazed.

The deep hazel eyes and laughing mouth were the same; but the dark waving masses of nut-brown hair were gone; fair rings clustered around his brow instead, gold as Loraine's own, soft and shining.

The effect was marvelous. Those who had admired Ulmont Ulvesford before, were doubly charmed with him now.

Since his illness he had been given to strange fits of melancholy reveries, which seemed ever seeking some thought quite forgotten, which brought with them a vague, indefinable pain; he could never tell why he always attributed it to some vanished fancy during his illness; he did not care to remember it. Mrs. Ulvesford clasped Loraine in her arms, saying the happiest day of her life would be the day which made her her son's wife.

Again, through the cruel mysteries of fate, the wedding preparations were going steadily on. This time it was concluded that the ceremony should be performed at the church in the early morning, when the sun was shining and the birds were singing.

"I could never endure a repetition of that cruel night at Lorrimer Hall, when I thought I had lost you," whispered Loraine.

"You shall have your own way, my darling," answered Ulmont; "your will shall be my law."

So it was arranged that the wedding should take place at the church, and be as quiet a one as was possible.

The propitious morning dawned at last.

At an early hour a long array of carriages drew up before the little vine-covered church in the suburbs. The sunshine drifted down through the foliage like molten gold; the robins in the green branches mingled their notes with the tuneful bobolink, the sweet scent of honeysuckle and pink clover wafted their fragrance over the hawthorn hedges, the sun hinted love to the clouds, the birds sang of love to their mates; love was the song the little brook sang as it danced joyfully over the white pebbles—all nature sang of love on this pitiful marriage morn.

Ulmont would allow no shadow to cross the brightness of the day. If one of those strange, brooding fancies he

could not define stole over him, he shook it off and forgot it in watching the beautiful, flower-like face of Loraine.

Neither the sunshine, the flowers, the birds, nor the brooklet warned them of the fatal tragedy which was about to be enacted; a tragedy too deep, too bitter for words to describe, and they went on to their doom with a smile on their faces.

The sunshine streamed in through the colored windows, flecking the bride's soft, fleecy robes, with bars of crimson, purple, and gold.

Ulmont pressed the little hand tenderly as they took their places at the altar.

Suddenly, and without warning, dark clouds scudded across the sunshine, the soft, summer breeze wailed among the tall oak trees and the flowering lilacs; the blossoms on the hillside swayed to and fro, bending their heads before the storm.

The distant ocean wildly beat the shore like a relentless, angry spirit; in one brief instant the face of nature had changed. Thunder rolled across the darkening sky, and vivid flashes of lightning, following each other in rapid succession, felled many a stately forest oak, whose crashing as it fell to earth was plainly heard, and they lit up the group that stood before the dim altar, with its cold, bright glare.

Loraine's face was very pale, and Ulmont noticed the little hand which he held fluttered slightly. Ulmont Ulvesford's face was calm and implacable as a marble statue. A half hour after they had entered the dim, old church they were pronounced--oh, cruel mockery of fate —pronounced man and wife. Both loyal, innocent, and trusting, fate was dealing them a bitter blow.

As the last words had been spoken by the pastor, which, as they firmly believed, bound them to each other for weal or for woe, Loraine Ulvesford lifted her eyes to meet the cold, calm gaze of Heath Hampton, while behind him, stealing silently away like a grim, foreboding shadow, was the figure of Vatal, the dwarf.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FATAL JOURNEY.

Six weeks abroad had passed since that bright, sunny morning, when Ulmont Ulvesford and Loraine had stood before the altar in the little church. They had visited France, Italy, and sunny Spain, and were now *en route* to Switzerland.

"Let us visit the Alps last, my husband," Loraine had

said. "I want the scenes I love best to linger last in my memory."

Ulmont was loth to leave the blue skies of Spain, where the olive and the myrtle ripen luxuriantly under the golden sunshine.

"Now that I have you with me, Loraine," he said, "I could linger here forever."

Had Loraine remained in Spain, as her husband so strangely urged, the first cloud that crossed the horizon of their wedded life might never have risen.

Together they went to Savoy, that marvelous valley which lies under the bowlders of Mont Blanc.

Loraine's delight was as rapturous as a child's as she culled the Alpine roses from the edge of the frowning glaciers.

Loraine never forgot that first day in Switzerland, or the surprise which awaited her before it had ended.

Ulmont had gone to visit the monastery of St. Bernard. Loraine had remained behind, being fatigued with the day's ramble.

"You will not be lonely, my darling," questioned Ulmont, encircling the slender waist with his arm, and drawing the golden head to his shoulder. "If I thought you would have one lonely moment, I could enjoy nothing. Your sweet face would rise between me and aught else."

He took the rosy face between his hands, kissing the proud, rosebud mouth.

"Lonely, oh, no," she replied, with a blithe little laugh; "I shall have too much to think of for that. I shall draw this couch before the window, and watch the bright stars, thinking how happy we are, Ulmont. I have been thinking, too, of so many little plans for the future; some of them, perhaps, very foolish ones. I will tell you them when they are quite perfected, but not now, Ulmont."

"Very well, dear, I shall try to bear very patiently being shut out from these wonderful plans, but remember, my sweet, deep thinking is hurtful to youth and beauty; leave that to those who are older, more careworn, and weary."

Below, they could hear the voices of the tourists, who were quite ready for the evening jaunt, in the hallway below, awaiting Ulmont's coming.

"One moment more," said Ulmont, smilingly; "I should like one of those roses you are wearing, Loraine; it will seem to me a part of your own sweet self."

As Loraine handed to him the coveted bud, which she wore on her breast, the leaves fell in a crimson shower upon the floor at his feet; nothing but the stem remained.

Loraine dropped it with a startled cry. Ulmont saw,

even in the shaded lamplight, how pale her face had grown.

He caught the white hands in his own, clasping them together round his neck.

"Never mind, Loraine," he said, laughingly: "no wonder the rose preferred total extinction to repose on any other resting-place than that from which it had been displaced. I fear I too am very much like that rose, Loraine."

She laughed a sweet, low, happy laugh.

"I wonder if every husband is as clever a lover as you are, Ulmont," she said.

"If they are not, they certainly ought to be."

"Then Shakesphere never would have written: 'Men are April when they woo, but December when they wed,'" she replied, archly.

"Your sky shall never change, love," said Ulmont, tenderly, filling out the sentence that he read in the limpid blue eyes upraised to his own.

Loraine's face flushed to the exquisite hue of a blush-rose; her beautiful eyes were filled with the sweetest love-light, and her scarlet mouth was curved in the sweetest of smiles; she was so happy, her heart was as light and free as a bird's.

Life was so full and rich—the world was so fair; if that kind of a dream could last, earth would be Heaven.

Loraine stood at the window watching her husband's form in the moonlight until he had disappeared.

How long she stood there wrapped in her happy dreams she never knew.

A slight touch on her arm startled her.

"I beg madam's pardon," said a tidy, white-capped maid, "I have spoken twice, yet madam did not heed me. I was to place this letter in your own hands, and return for your answer."

She placed a small, white envelope in Loraine's hand, courtesied, and was gone.

"I wonder from whom it can possibly be?" thought Loraine wonderingly, glancing at the signature. "Heath Hampton," she cried aloud in her surprise.

She was amazed at finding him in Switzerland.

"You will forgive me, Loraine—Mrs. Ulvesford," he wrote, "but when I heard you were stopping here I could not pass Savoy without seeing you. The sight of American faces, and especially old friends, too, are really a treat in Switzerland. As I expect to leave Savoy to-morrow, if agreeable, I should like to call. I sincerely trust you will grant me at least a few moments."

At that moment the maid reappeared.

"Tell the gentleman I will await him on the portico," she said.

As Loraine stepped out on the portico, which ran, according to the Swiss custom, the entire length of the building, accessible from the ground floor by a flight of steps from either end, a gentleman who had evidently awaited her with no little impatience, stepped gracefully forward, extending his hands.

Tall, stately, self-possessed, she went forward to greet him.

"Loraine, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Ulvesford, I should say," bowing low over the slender, white hand, "need I tell you how pleased I am to see you?"

The proud blue eyes held none other than a courteous, formal greeting for him.

"How you have altered, Loraine; you left us a few weeks ago a bright, merry school-girl, now I find you—a queen!"

Loraine merely bowed at the pretty compliment.

"I am sorry my husband is not here," she said; "he will be sorry to have missed seeing you if you leave Savoy tomorrow morning."

The smile on his handsome face darkened.

Had Loraine been more worldly wise she would have known Ulmont's absence was what he desired above all things

"You seem to have forgotten the time, Loraine," he said, half-laughingly, half-bitterly, still persisting in calling her by the old name, "when we found the moments passed quite quickly and happily without a third party."

"Of course that is all different now, Mr. Hampton," she said, looking up surprisedly.

"Most certainly it is, as you say, different now, Loraine."

He was perfectly calm and unembarrassed; while Loraine looked away over the moonlit hills, murmuring something about childish folly.

They talked of home, and Loraine told him how happy she would be when she reached America.

Their conversation was the exchange of thought of old friends.

Loraine spoke of their travels, and of the people whom they had met.

Heath Hampton always referred to himself as being the loneliest of men.

"I cannot understand why that should be so," she replied.

"I shall never care to look upon a woman's face again,"

he said, with a deep sigh, "or care for their friendship; I love the memory of the old ones best, Loraine."

Deep in her heart Loraine was wishing her husband would return; the conversation was growing exceedingly irksome.

"I have thought so much of the old ones," he continued; "I have found home fearfully dull, I sought what little comfort I could find abroad."

"I sincerely hope you will find the comfort you seek, Mr. Hampton," she replied, with the artless simplicity of a child.

"I have found it now for the first time in many weeks," he said.

Loraine was certainly blind not to have read the meaning in those dark, reckless, flashing, eager eyes, bent so steadily upon her face, so deaf that she could not hear it in the modulation of his low, intense voice.

"I am pleased you think so well of Switzerland," she said, simply.

"It is not that," he answered, quite impatient that she did not understand him more fully. "I shall always like Savoy, for the pleasant associations of this one evening, Loraine."

She looked at him in wonder.

"Loraine," he said, sorrowfully and respectfully, drawing his chair closer to where she sat. "You must not chide me for what I am going to say, the words have trembled upon my lips for months, I must speak, if I am never permitted to look upon your face again. Can you tell why I left America, why home had lost all charms for me, and why I came to Savoy?"

"I cannot even guess," she replied.

"I was ever haunted by a beautiful face—a face that was dearer to me than my very life, one whom I would have died to have called my wife. You cannot imagine such a depth of love; words cannot explain it!"

"I can, and do fully understand such a love, Mr. Hampton; such is my love for Ulmont; I never could find words to fully express it."

It was well the shadow of night fell between them. Loraine Ulvesford would have started back in horror had she beheld the terrible expression on the darkly-handsome face turned from her, or could have probed the terrible resolve that lay brooding in his heart.

That one answer Loraine had spoken, forged the last link in the fatal chain of his thoughs.

Had she breathed those words standing near a cliff, in his bitter anger, maddened at the thought of the wealth

that might have been his had she but married *him*, he could not have answered for what he might have done.

"Your husband possesses a jewel in you, Loraine; one whose rare purity is a blessing to the sex."

As he spoke, he clasped quickly both her small, white hands that lay idly in her lap.

At that opportune moment Ulmont Ulvesford, with light, bouyant tread, sprang lightly up the steps, appearing suddenly before them.

As he glanced at the dark, handsome face of Heath Hampton, bowing low over Loraine's hands, he turned white to the very lips.

CHAPTER IX.

JEALOUSY.

ULMONT'S amazement was scarely exceeded by his annoyance upon recognizing Heath Hampton, whom he had left in Boston, bending over his wife's hand in far-off Switzerland, in that lover-like fashion; it reminded him too forcibly of the days when neither of them had been quite sure as to which was the favored one in Loraine's eyes.

A sudden, keen, quick pang of jealousy leaped into his heart; that torch, which, once lighted, causes many a conflagration in hitherto peaceful homes.

Ulmont had quite forgotten the old, unhappy forebodings that had enfolded him.

Heath Hampton's face, dark, flashing and brilliant, filled him with a strange sense of pain.

He had thought he had Loraine all to himself.

He found himself wondering if it was merely a chance accident that brought Heath Hampton just then to Switzerland.

Ulmont knew, although they had been rivals, as his countryman he must greet him at least courteously, if not cordially.

The Ulvesfords were a deep-loving race, self-willed and exacting.

"I could never accept half a heart," Ulmont had often said. "I must have the whole, or I relinquish all. One whom I love must give not even one thought to another."

"My dear boy, you are surprised to see me in Switzerland, I imagine," Hampton said, with a warm, hearty hand-shake, "but I assure you not more so than I myself at being here. I heard you were at Savoy, and I promised myself the pleasure of calling."

It was only accidental then.

Ulmont felt relieved.

Heath Hampton possessed the happy faculty of making

himself exceedingly agreeable to men as well as the fair sex, and before the evening wore away, Ulmont was seriously pondering if he did not do him an injustice by harboring the suspicions which for a brief time had disturbed him.

Loraine had excused herself and retired to her own room, leaving them alone together to chat over old times as they puffed their Havanas, and by the time Heath Hampton parted from Ulmont, it was agreed he should stay the following week at Savoy, making one of their party and returning home to America.

A deep, meaning smile hovered for an instant about Heath Hampton's mouth.

"Capital," he muttered, under his breath, meanwhile inwardly wondering at Ulmont's trustfulness, who little dreamed that the serpent, who had slowly but surely gained an entrance into this peaceful Eden, would turn upon the hand that had given it shelter.

"So, so!" muttered Hampton that night, as he slowly retraced his steps to his lodgings, "I had not expected such an easy victory—the leaven works well; Loraine shall reach America, and so shall I; but mark me, I have sworn by the fortune he swept from my grasp, the green vales of Switzerland shall be Ulmont Ulvesford's tomb, and these icy towers his monument!"

Meanwhile Ulmont was wondering, as he entered the room where she sat, what she would say when he told her Heath Hampton had decided to remain in Savoy, accompanying them on their homeward trip to America.

An exclamation of surprise and dismay broke from Loraine's lips, which she instantly repressed. No matter what her own secret feelings were on the subject, she believed she had no right to raise an objection if her husband really desired his presence. While Ulmont, as he watched Loraine's face narrowly, was thinking:

"How foolish I was, after all, to ever imagine my Loraine cared for Heath Hampton."

The week that followed was the most eventful one that had ever come to the gay, careless life of Ulmont Ulvesford; a week which brought the bitterest of bitter fruits, which were to be deep sown in his heart.

There were strange whisperings among the tourists, who watched with darkening brows the assiduous attention the dark-browed stranger paid the beautiful, stately, fair-haired wife.

Was the young husband mad, they asked themselves, to permit it? Why was he so blind?

Everyone, even the most exacting, could see that the fair young wife, in action, thought and word, was as pure

as the white lilies that lay on the tranquil bosom of the stream down in the smiling valley.

She was utterly innocent and ignorant of the world of sin, or the flowery paths that led to its horrible brinks

One friend, more daring than the rest, who had a fair young bride of his own, whom he quite idolized, ventured to remonstrate with Ulmont in a mild way

"I have heard Mr. Hampton was quite attached to your wife at one time, Mr. Ulvesford," he said, carelessly.

"That was all nonsense," laughed Ulmont, good-humoredly; "he had quite a fancy for my wife at one time, I believe. We have often laughed over our wine about it since."

"There are many men whose first love is the one grand, supreme passion of their lives," remarked Wylmer Lee, gravely.

"How seriously you are inclined to treat such trifling matters," said Ulmont, thoughtfully, lighting his cigar, and waving the curling rings of smoke away with his hand.

"Contemplation makes me serious," remarked his fellow-traveler; "I have seen much of life in my time. Why, do you know," he continued, energetically, "I would as soon think of a sleek tiger creeping stealthily into the fold where my lambs were treasured, as to see an old lover holding my wife's hand, or gazing into her eyes, with poisonous adulation upon his lips."

"A man's wife should be held above all reproach, all censure; she whom he trusts with his life's happiness, can guard his honor," responded Ulmont, proudly; but even though he spoke confidently, a thousand doubts and fears were busy with his imagination.

He did not care to admit, even to himself, he had not acted wisely in permitting his wife's old lover to join their party.

Had not the past proven conclusively which one of them Loraine had loved?

"Pshaw!" he said to himself. "How absurd of me to indulge such ridiculous fancies!"

Still, the arrow had pierced his heart; he was a prey to conflicting emotions.

There is nothing that rends the heart, that destroys all hope, that ruins a life by arousing the keenest sorrow so quickly as the pangs of jealousy, the worst disease which can afflict the human race.

Ulmont would have died before he would have doubted, for an instant, the beautiful, peerless Loraine; still, he realized he had made a mistake in playing with fire that had once burned with a passionate flame.

How could he tell that love for his beautiful Loraine did not still slumber in Heath Hampton's heart?

He remembered vividly how the Count de Risnar, a personal friend of Hampton's, had engaged him so often for hours at a time in his subtle, graceful way, while Heath Hampton invariably talked with Loraine.

On Ulmont's previous visit to France he had met the Count de Risnar; once they had differed slightly in opinion on some trifling matter; those who heard the debate were unanimously in favor of Ulmont's theory; the count had submitted with the courtly grace of his race, but then and there he had registered a bitter vow of vengeance against the young American.

He would humble him yet, in the very dust at his feet. He meant to keep his word, he was shrewd and far-seeing.

When he learned Heath Hampton had once been the lover of Loraine Ulvesford, he saw a way to work out that revenge.

He well knew the cruelest blow he could inflict upon Ulmont's haughty heart, was through his beautiful young bride.

Still, with all his suave manners and subtle arts, the count owned to himself he was not more cunning than Heath Hampton.

This was the link that bound these two so closely.

Strange thoughts had found lodgment in Ulmont's breast since that conversation with Wylmer Lee.

Could it be his imagination only that his friends dropped their voices to almost a whisper when he came unexpectedly among them, or ceased speaking altogether?

Of what were they talking? Was it possible they, too, thought—but, pshaw! Why give himself unnecessary annoyance?

It was a lovely day preceding their departure for America. Ulmont never forgot that terrible day; it stood out clear and distinct upon his mind for many a year afterward.

That morning he had gone with Loraine to see the sun rise for the last time on the Alps.

The first golden rays were peeping above the huge, icy pillars, lighting them up with a thousand arrowy sparkles; a waterfall, struck by its rays, fell in fiery orange foam down the red and blue sparkling walls of a beautiful glacier, losing itself in the still bluer mist of the double dome below, that seemed to spread out like transparent, purple glass, gradually melting into glowing crimson as the sun's rays pierced the ravine below.

Loraine's hands were clasped within his own; they were trembling slightly, and her face was very pale.

"I wish you had not brought me to this spot on the edge of the precipice, Ulmont," she whispered.

"Why, my love?" he asked, wonderingly. "This is the grandest and most sublime spot on the Alps."

"If I tell you why, you will not laugh at me, my husband?"

For answer he drew the golden head closer to his breast, kissing the rosy mouth.

"Certainly not, my sweet."

"I saw this very spot in my dreams last night," she answered, slowly. "I thought you were standing on this very spot; others were around you, their dark faces between you and the sunlight. Your face was white, and you called out suddenly: 'Loraine, my wife, where are you?' As I ran to you with outstretched hands, a woman's face came between us, a proud, beautiful, foreign face, with scornful lips and flashing eyes. As I turned from her in wonder, the beautiful face had vanished, the cold pillars of ice seemed to close over you, my husband, and I saw, standing there, only Heath Hampton, while beside him, a cruel smile on his lips, stood a dark-browed stranger.

CHAPTER X.

A DUEL IN THE ALPS.

ALL the day that followed, Heath Hampton hovered like a persistent shadow around Loraine, who was quite annoyed at his attention.

"Why," she asked herself, sorrowfully, "did Ulmont, her husband, seem to prefer the society of the Frenchman to her own, leaving her to spend the lonely hours as best she might in the society of Heath Hampton?"

Ths scenery from Loraine's window was sublime; yet, as she stood there in her royal, azure-tinted robe, the breeze toying with the soft lace that encircled her throat, and loosened her golden hair in which a spray of blossoms clung, she was not thinking of the beautiful sights upon which her eye rested; she had pushed aside her books, the very sunlight and the flowers tired her; she was glad, she told herself, she was to start for America on the morrow.

Loraine was writing for her husband; she had no heart, no thought away from him, and the hours seemed dull and long which parted them.

Again she took up her book, but the story had no power to charm her.

She laid her fair young cheek on the crimson cover, with the question on her red lips:

"Why does Ulmont not come to me?"

Ah! it was well for Loraine Ulvesford she did not know why.

In another part of the building, where the tourists smoked their cigars, watching the snow-covered crags above and the crags beneath, Heath Hampton sat with a party of friends, including De Risnar.

Ulmont came among the group quite unnoticed, so engrossed were they in the recital of some story from the reminiscence of Hampton's exploits.

"Ah, yes, gentlemen," continued Hampton, buoyantly, "at that time I stood in high favor with the peerless beauty."

There were the fumes of wine on his breath and a reckless glance in his eye.

De Risnar, alone, of all the group, had noticed Ulmont's approach.

"It is a thousand pities you did not marry her then, but I suppose there is a double charm about her now that she is beyond your reach, eh, Hampton?" remarked some loquacious bystander.

A low, sardonic laugh broke from Heath Hampton's lips, a laugh that froze the blood in Ulmont's heart as he heard it.

"Loraine will always be the most charming girl in the world in my eyes; let us drink, gentlemen," he cried, "to the fair beauty of Loraine!"

A gentleman sitting a little apart from the rest, and who would bear no more, sprang to his feet, but he was too late; a strong arm forced him back, as a face white as death flashed past him, crying out:

"Sit down, Wylmer, thank God, *I* am here to protect my wife's fair name!'

The next instant Heath Hampton had received a stinging blow in the face, that sent him reeling into De Risnar's arms.

"Now, coward that you are," cried Ulmont, white to the very lips, "apologize this instant for taking my wife's name thus wantonly upon your base lips, or your life shall pay the forfeit!"

"Never," cried Heath Hampton, recklessly, his cheeks flushed, and a baleful light gleaming in his eyes. "I repeat it. Let us drink to the peerless Loraine!"

"Ulvesford, for Heaven's sake come away," cried Wylmer Lee, holding him back by main force, but he might as well have spoken to the winds.

Heath Hampton by this time had recovered himself, and hastily taking his glove from his pocket, his eyes flashing with a glaring, triumphant gleam, he flung it in Ulmont's face.

"I accept your challenge," said Ulmont, in a clear, ring-

ing voice, having regained his composure; "and," he continued, briefly, "this duel must be fought at once!"

"That suits me perfectly," answered Hampton.

"I will meet you in fifteen minutes at any place you may choose to name; is the time too short?" asked Ulmont, haughtily. "Say an hour from now, in the old abbey above the village."

Ulmont bowed haughtily, while Hampton concluded:

"Our seconds will attend to the rest."

Again Ulmont bowed coldly.

"Wylmer," he said, turning to Lee, who stood near him, "I am in need of a friend to-night—can I rely upon you?"

Wylmer Lee pressed his hand warmly—that one hearty clasp without words was enough. Ulmont Ulvesford knew that he would stand by him in life—or in death, if need be.

This was the ultimatum Wylmer Lee had long foreseen.

* * * * * * *

The dark sky was star-set, and a full moon had risen, bathing the snow-covered grounds and ruins upon the extreme heights with a silvery radiance, giving the picturesque spot, upon which an awful tragedy was soon to be enacted, a quiet, peaceful look.

It was a lonely, romantic spot, high up on the summit of the Alps. No sound could be heard save the whistling of the wind through the branches of the trees, and through the crumbling, ivy-grown walls and deserted halls of the once grand old abbey, that had fallen into ruin.

The spot chosen for the duel was a clearing in the midst of the ruins.

On one side were high, perpendicular, icy crags; on the other a steep, slippery descent; its only canopy, the starry heaven and the meeting branches of the dark pine trees.

Suddenly footsteps sounded on the crisp, crackling snow, and two dark figures halted at the place indicated.

A low cry, which Ulmont instantly suppressed, sprang to his lips.

"Heaven—can it be an ill omen?" he muttered, thoughtfully. "This is the exact spot Loraine saw in her dream!"

Wylmer Lee touched him on the arm.

"They are coming, Ulvesford," he said.

Another moment Heath Hampton, De Risnar, and a small, wiry individual, enveloped in a dark cloak, and carrying a black leather case, appeared, who was introduced to Ulmont as the surgeon.

Few words passed between them. Proud, cold, defiant, and bitter, they stepped forth, swords in hand, out into the moonlight.

A silence, still as death, lasted for a second only. Then

the combatants had crossed swords and the terrible work began; both felt the strength of his opponent's arm.

Heath Hampton was sure this would be a victory easily won. Only one thought rushed madly through Ulmont Ulvesford's brain—his wife, his beautiful Loraine, and his mother.

The thought gave renewed strength to his arm; one instant only he pressed his hand to his feverish brow; another instant and a terrible imprecation burst from Heath Hampton's lips, as his arm dropped heavily to his side. It was a never-to-be-forgotten scene by those who witnessed it. His sword fell to the icy ground with a dull clang.

"You have won the game this time, Ulvesford," he cried, hoarsely, bitterly, and still defiantly; "but mark me, there is still a future."

"There is also a present," responded Ulmont, sternly.

Seeing further satisfaction was at an end, as he was not one of those who would pursue a worsted foe, nor trample a fallen enemy, Ulmont turned on his heel, and followed by Wylmer Lee, left the spot, leaving the surgeon and the count with Heath Hampton and the solemn hush of the night.

A half hour later Ulmont entered the room where Loraine still sat, her white hands clasping the book which lay in her lap.

"Truant, how late you are," she said, playfully; "where were you?"

"I was unexpectedly detained," he replied.

"Thank you, dear, for your very lucid explanation; I know all about it now," she said, sweetly, with a pretty, arch smile.

"I have certainly explained all worth knowing," he said. Loraine was sure she detected a forced calmness in his voice.

She turned on the light and looked at her husband. She saw his face was colorless, with a hard, fixed expression about the mouth.

"What is the matter, Ulmont, my husband!" she cried, springing to his side, speechless with terror; "has anything happened? How white and ill you look!"

He sat down on the sofa, drawing her toward him, with a deep sigh, as he replied:

"Nothing out of the usual order of events has happened, Loraine; everything is as it should be."

He did not care to tell her the truth—just then; not until he knew more of Heath Hampton's condition.

They sat for a few moments in silence; then Ulmont turned and looked upon his beautiful young wife in her

artless, peerless beauty. She wore a soft, shining, violet silk, and just where she sat the lights from the colored lamps fell full upon her; one great dash of purple lay at her feet, a bar of crimson quivered on her breast, and on the beautiful head there shone a glow of gold; her lovely face was pale with wonder, yet it seemed like a fair, tender flower among the mystical lights.

"Loraine," said Ulmont, with a brave attempt at gay raillery, "if anything were to happen to me, would it change your love for me?"

For answer, she led him to the window.

"Do you see that pale, serene moon," she said, "struggling athwart those fleecy clouds? The broad glare of day may hide it from our sight, and the dark clouds of night may for awhile envelop it, yet we feel sure that calm, patient moon will struggle silently through all, and resume her constant vigil over the slumbering earth. My love shall be just as constant, Ulmont. Nothing could change my love for you; I have often thought I could never die and leave you, husband!"

As Ulmont looked down upon her, he noticed all the dainty bloom had vanished from both cheek and lip, like a delicate blossom in a sudden frost.

"My sweet Loraine," he whispered, reverentially, bending his head and caressing her white brow.

As his hand clasped hers, a low, startled cry fell from her lips.

"Look, Ulmont!" she cried, in an awful whisper, holding his hand full up to the light; "oh, Ulmont—my husband—see! there is blood upon it!"

CHAPTER XI.

MARKS OF BLOOD.

For a moment the husband and wife stood facing each other in ominous silence.

"Will you tell me how this came upon your hand, Ulmont?" she asked.

For one brief instant the impulse seized him to tell her all. He could not endure the glance of horror such a recital would bring to those blue eyes; Loraine, so pure and artless; what, could he tell her what he had done for *her* sake?

He glanced down at the hand which the two dark spots defaced, quite at a loss how to account for them. His quick, keen perception soon showed him a loophole.

"I have been on a ramble to the old abbey ruins," he replied, carelessly; "I may have touched one of the jagged rocks in passing, but I really have no recollection of doing

so; in fact, I had not noticed my hand until you called my attention to it."

Loraine took her handkerchief from her pocket—a small, delicate, flimsy affair of lace and perfume.

"Let me bind it up for you, dear," she said, earnestly.

Ulmont looked at the tiny bit of lace with an amused smile.

"I assure you, my sweet Loraine, you are making a mountain out of a mole-hill."

He drew the white arms around his neck and the golden head drooped on his breast.

"You know you are my world, Ulmont," she whispered. "Why should I not be solicitous about you? I always imagine that those who love deeply, yet do not show their love, resemble the sun shining behind a cloud."

"That is certainly one way of looking at it, Loraine," he replied, "but remember, still waters run deep. There are people who love intensely, yet have no power of expressing their affection."

Loraine pondered many a time over her husband's remark, and wondered more than once what he had meant by it.

Ulmont was more tender than usual, if that were possible, but beneath it all, Loraine read a strange unrest.

He scarcely smiled, until the towering icy heights and sunny vales of Switzerland had faded from his sight.

* * * * * * *

Ulmont and Loraine reached Boston late in the fall.

The sky was blue, but the air was keen and sharp, and the hoar-frost lay white on the ground, the trees, and the housetops, and shone like diamonds in the sunlight on the branching evergreens.

That was a coming home long to be remembered. Everyone spoke of the glowing beauty of the happy young wife, and of the lover-like devotion of the young husband.

The two mothers watched their children with great contentment. Ulmont's mother declared it was quite like living her own youth over again to watch the pretty love-dream of her son and his beautiful bride. Yet there was one circumstance which puzzled her—there seemed to be some secret thought preying upon his mind.

The day he had returned home, a greeting had been given him which would have pleased a lord; yet, after it was all over he had flung himself down on the sofa and turned his face to the wall, saying he "was tired of it all—he wanted to rest." An hour later, upon kneeling beside him, his mother found the pillow, upon which his fair

head lay, wet with tears. Did this look like happiness—yet, why should he not be so?

There was another matter which did not escape the keen, watchful eyes of his mother; she noticed how eagerly Ulmont watched for the mails which brought the foreign papers; she did not fail to observe the look of relief that crept into his eyes as he laid them down, one by one, still she made no comment. She never remembered her son to have taken so much interest in foreign affairs before; she was exceedingly puzzled.

One evening Loraine sat at the piano, her white fingers running idly over the ivory keys. Ulmont sat near her, gazing thoughtfully into the gloomy coals in the grate, while his mother sat opposite him, deeply interested in the columns of the Boston *Herald.*

Suddenly she glanced up.

"Loraine, my dear," she said, "there is news for you."

"Good news, I hope," laughed Loraine.

"Better than might have been expected," replied Mrs. Ulvesford, as she continued; "it is about young Heath Hampton. Shall I read it?"

Loraine turned, with a look of wonder on her face.

"What of him? Read it, by all means. We met him abroad, in Switzerland. Has he returned?"

"No, my dear, nor is he likely to do so soon."

"Why?" asked Loraine; "has some Swiss beauty captured the devoted cavalier?"

"No," replied Mrs. Ulvesford, gravely; "not that."

As she spoke, she spread out the paper she held; her eyes voluntarily falling upon the face of her son; in that one instant, it seemed as if long years had passed over his head; his face was hard and drawn, and his eyes wore a strange, unnatural brilliancy.

"You have not told us the news yet," persisted Loraine.

Ulmont's questioning eyes repeated the remark more eloquently than words could have done.

"It is about a duel," continued his mother; "a duel wherein a young and beautiful American lady was concerned."

"Is—is her name mentioned, mother?"

Both ladies looked up in surprise; they could scarcely believe the hoarse, unnatural voice they had heard belonged to Ulmont.

"No name is given," replied Mrs. Ulvesford.

Neither his young wife nor his mother heard the fervent "thank God" he breathed from his heart, although no sound issued from his lips.

"I always imagined him an impulsive young man," pur-

sued Mrs. Ulvesford, calmly; "still I never imagined his rashness would lead him to such an end."

"Surely he is not dead," gasped Ulmont, his impatience and intense anxiety almost overpowering him; in another instant he was kneeling by his mother's side, eagerly scanning the paper in her lap.

No, not dead; the wound on the hand had occasioned considerable loss of blood, ending the encounter, but was not necessarily considered dangerous, unless inflammation set in. His opponent had hurriedly left Savoy.

The details concerning the affair were meagerly given.

"See," exclaimed Loraine, pointing to the date, "this must have happened the evening before we left Savoy. I wondered why Heath Hampton failed to put in an appearance on the day of our departure; this accounts for it."

The news of the duel, which, for some unaccountable reason, failed to give Ulmont's name, proved a nine days' wonder.

Curiosity was rife concerning the lady, who she was, and everything concerning the scandal being the general topic of the day.

Ulmont heard it discussed on the streets, in his mother's drawing-room, even his young wife when they were alone, seemed eager to speak of the one absorbing topic; wondering who the young and beautiful lady was, and if she had loved Heath Hampton.

Ulmont thought he would certainly go mad. How little Loraine imagined she had been the cause of that combat, against which Ulmont had pitted his very life to protect her honor!

Soon after this an event happened which had long been expected. Ulmont's mother, who had never been strong, when the leaves began to fall, was laid at rest in the churchyard, where the ladies of their race had slumbered for long years. Otherwise, everything moved on in the same routine at the manor.

One December morning Mrs. Lorrimer had driven over from Lorrimer Place to see her daughter.

A deep snow lay on the ground, and the merry, jingling sleigh-bells rang sharply out on the morning air. It was just such a morning as brings a flush to the cheek, brightness to the eye, and a warm glow to the heart.

The sunshine gleamed ruddily through the leafless branches of the trees, and the deer bent their heads to drink, breaking through the thin ice that had formed over the clear, glassy pools.

Never did Loraine look so picturesquely lovely as she stood at the window, gazing out upon the winter landscape,

her crimson robe forming a glowing background to her fair beauty.

She was so gentle, so clinging, just such a woman as men reverence, love, and protect. Her life had been free from care. She was not at all the kind of a woman to be slain by love—smitten to the earth idly as the yellow buttercup that grows in the fields.

How was she to know, on this beautiful day, that the darkest shadow that ever fell upon a pure, young life, was to cast its first blight upon her!

All the joy and happiness that life holds had been hers. She had married for love, and her handsome, debonair young husband's love was the crown of her earthly ambition, the star of her existence. She had been a loved and petted child, and was a loved and petted wife.

Loraine's life had always been gay and brilliant; the quiet isolation of home life was beginning to tell upon her.

It had been the custom for generations back to give a grand ball at Ulvesford Mansion every Christmas Eve.

It was at last decided, after much discussing, that the annual ball should be given. It was to be a grand affair, everyone agreed.

Whatever the charming young mistress of Ulvesford Mansion did, would be done brilliantly.

"You know, dear," said Loraine, laying her hand on her husband's arm, "it is our first ball at home. I mean to make this a memorable one."

"As if anything you undertook would be aught else," he replied, smilingly.

A memorable one! Heaven pity her! That one night would shut out from her young life all the brightness of this world.

The chiming bells which would usher in that Christmas morning could have whispered a strange, startling secret to her.

Ulmont Ulvesford little knew, as he caressed his young wife's golden hair, that the event which would happen on that Christmas Eve would bring him the keenest sorrow mortal man ever experienced.

CHAPTER XII.

IZETTA.

SOME few months *previous* to the events narrated in our last chapter, the golden sun was just setting over the quiet little village of Silvernook.

The soft, dreamy silence which pervaded this quiet, rural spot, was broken only by the chirping of birds the lowing

of the distant kine, or bit of song from some blithe young milkmaid's lips, as she drove home the cows.

Along the flower-bordered path that followed the windings of a deep, silent, rock-bedded river, walked an old man, leaning heavily on his cane.

As he turned an abrupt angle he started back with a cry of surprise; before him, lying face downward in the long, daisy-studded grass, lay a young girl, sobbing bitterly.

She was certainly a stranger in that locality; Abel never remembered having seen her before.

"Child," said the old flute-maker, touching her gently on the shoulder, "why do you weep? Surely youth cannot know so soon the bitter dregs life's cup holds; why do you weep?"

He never forgot the sad expression on the beautiful face raised to his in the gloaming; a sweet, foreign face, white with anguish, yet perfect as a marble statue.

Tear-drops quivered on the long, dark lashes that veiled the beautiful, scornful, dark eyes.

For a moment only those eyes searched wistfully the rugged, yet honest face before her.

She only shook her head, and the tears flowed afresh; then a sudden thought came to her.

"Perhaps you will tell me, sir, what I ought to do," she said, with a low, pitiful sob. "I am so helpless I cannot even think."

"Perhaps I may be able to advise you if you will tell me your trouble, you forget that I do not know," replied the flute-maker, seating himself on an adjacent rock. "Surely you are not alone, my child?" he asked, wonderingly.

"Yes, sir, I am all alone," she replied. "I will tell you how it came about. Then, perhaps, you can tell me what I ought to do. My husband, who had been called suddenly home, gave me a note to bring to his old nurse in Silvernook, with whom I was to remain a few days until he came for me."

Again the tears started to the lovely eyes, and her voice quivered in a broken sob.

"I have lost the address he gave me, and—and the money my husband gave me I must have left in the train."

Abel Moore was lost in bewilderment; he could not understand it.

She married! This young creature with the beautiful foreign face, scarcely more than a child, married! He could hardly credit what he heard.

"Have you no recollection of the name of the person you wish to find?" he asked.

"None whatever, sir."

"Who is your husband, child, what is his name, I mean?"

"Alderic Ross, sir, and I am his wife Izetta."

She repeated the words with a simple, child-like dignity, as if the words were the sweetest music to her.

"Mr. Ross, of where?"

"That I do not know, sir."

The old flute-maker was growing each moment more mystified.

"Perhaps your own people could advise you best," he said, thoughtfully.

He never forgot how the beautiful face turned away from him with the saddest cry he had ever heard from human lips, as the words slowly trembled on the white lips.

"I have no one, sir; no one in all the wide world but Mr. Ross."

Gradually he drew from her her story, that seemed like a page of a sad romance.

"I could find no one in Silvernook who knew my husband," continued Izetta, "though I went from house to house; then I tried so hard to think what I should do, sir, until Alderic came for me, without home, friends, or money."

"How long have you been in Silvernook?"

"Since early yesterday morning. I could not find my husband's old nurse, so I came to this spot to think what was best to do."

"Have you been out in the cold and the darkness all night?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; but I did not feel the cold, and I hid my face among the daisies to shut out the darkness until morning came again."

Abel Moore could have wept for her, but one thought drifted across his mind, the same thought that had come to all who had heard her story.

Poor child! Heaven help her; she is cast adrift on the world; whether from folly or inexperience, they could not tell; it was hard to judge her.

The flute-maker hid his face in his hands; he could see she loved this man who had won her love with all the depths of her young, trusting heart.

It was one of the cruelest of tasks to undeceive her; how could he tear from her eyes the veil of innocence and trust, showing her the cold, mocking world, that would laugh at the woe which stretched out before her?

"Some villain has taken this means of ridding himself of this beautiful girl," he thought. "Oh, Lord!" cried Abel, holding up his hands to Heaven, "how canst Thou have patience with men?"

He wondered how they could live and breathe God's pure air, while such a sin as this stained their souls.

"You must bide your time patiently until he comes, my poor child. Has any thought occurred to you as to where you could go in the meantime?"

"No, sir; I had not thought much of that. I had a little change left, quite by accident, in my pocket, with which I could purchase food until my husband comes for me. I shall go to the depot when each train arrives, that I may be sure he will not miss me."

"God help her," mentally ejaculated the old flute-maker. "I fear those raven locks will whiten beneath the snows of many a year before the return of him for whom she would watch and wait!

"If she only had a mother to advise her," he thought; "she is so young, beautiful, artless, and so helpless. If she had sinned, it was with a soul so pure it might plead to Heaven for pardon, and find forgiveness there."

The flute-maker scarcely knew which way to point out to her.

"I have a good old wife at home, my child; come to her; surely Marguirette above all others will know what is best for you."

His face was so kind, his voice so gentle, Izetta arose and followed him at once.

"There is one thing I should like to ask you," said the old man, stopping short in the path. "Mind, I do not doubt what you have told me, but before I take you home to my Marguirette, I should like to ask you one question."

Izetta raised her eyes earnestly to his face.

"You have told me, child, your mother is dead."

Izetta looked up at the blue arched dome above her.

"If death were to claim you, would you have the hope of meeting your sainted mother, spotless, in Heaven?" he asked, solemnly.

"Yes," answered Izetta, clasping her hands reverentially, and turning her dark, sorrowful eyes up to the fleecy clouds above her.

From that moment the flute-maker would have staked his life upon Izetta's truthfulness and purity. Not another word was spoken, as he led her through the gloaming to his humble home.

How little she knew, as she walked up that shell-bordered path that, far away in his stately home, at that moment the good old doctor was bending over her husband's prostrate form, saying:

"His life hangs by a single thread; if he lives, his reason may be partially restored; never wholly, unless by a

violent shock, which would probably cost him his life. If he lives at all, you must be content."

In the midst of a bower of honey-suckles, purple lilacs and nodding sun-flowers, quite hidden from view like a bird's nest, was the flute-maker's cottage.

From the open doorway the soft whirring of a spinning-wheel fell upon their ear, and the low notes of a woman's voice singing the sweetest, most plaintive melody Izetta had ever heard.

The room was furnished plainly and neatly. A shaded lamp burned upon the mantel, from which the single occupant of the room was partially turned as if in expectancy.

"Is that you, Abel?" she called, as he paused on the threshold.

"Yes, Marguirette, wife, it is I."

"Ah!" exclaimed the old lady, softly. "I thought I heard a stranger's footsteps."

The venerable face, framed in its snowy hair, was bent slightly forward, and the blue eyes were turned inquiringly toward the door; yet in them was no sight. Poor lady! she was blind.

"You are right, Marguirette," answered the flute-maker; "I *have* brought a stranger with me—a young girl."

Izetta noticed how soft and low his voice grew as he spoke to her.

"A young girl, did you say, Abel?"

"Yes, one just about the age of our Amy, when—when——"

He did not finish the sentence, and Izetta saw him turn aside, a tear rolling down his furrowed cheek.

Izetta wondered why the poor lady clasped her in her arms so firmly to her beating heart, while her hands wandered tremblingly over her long, dark curls, as she murmured, quite under her breath:

"So like—ah, Abel, so like!"

Again Izetta, in her artless way, told Marguirette her pitiful story; there were tears in the sightless eyes when she ceased speaking.

The young girl spoke in such hopeful eagerness of the few days which must soon pass before her husband came for her.

Abel Moore looked at her, pondering what was best to be done. The sun had set, the birds were folding their wings, and the flowers long since had closed their eyes, while the bright stars were slowly fixing themselves in the sky above.

"Marguirette," he said, gently, "what shall we do for this child?"

Marguirette led him quietly to the window.

"Look," she said; "I cannot see that white cross upon which the stars are shining through the trees: but you can see it, Abel."

"I can see it," he replied, with a husky voice.

"For the sake of *her* who sleeps there, Abel—our all, who was so like this one—let us keep her here until the first great sting of her grief is over. I can better judge then, what is best for her future."

"Child, would you like to remain here for a few days?" he asked, turning to Izetta.

She crossed quickly over to where the old flute-maker and his wife stood by the window.

"I am very grateful to you," she said; "my husband will be very pleased that I have found so good a shelter."

"You love your—your husband very much?" said Marguirette, sadly.

"More than I can tell you," answered Izetta.

She wondered why the good woman said "poor child!" while she was so rich in her husband's love.

For many days that followed, the passengers on the incoming trains saw, eagerly watching from amid the green trees, a beautiful, expectant, joyful face, the most gloriously beautiful, foreign face they had ever seen, and they never forgot the white, despairing woe that settled over it, from which all joy, all light and happiness died out as the train slowly moved onward, leaving her there alone in her pitiful sorrow.

Thus the days slowly dragged along, lengthening into a week and the week to a fortnight; and yet he came not, and dark thoughts were creeping into the sad girl-wife's heart as she crept slowly home by the path on the brink of the dark river.

CHAPTER XIII.

HE COMETH NOT.

WHO could attempt to describe the next few days that followed; the rosy dawns watched for with such a pitiful, pleading face, and the tears which ushered in each gloaming?

After each train had departed and Izetta came not, Abel always knew where to look for her—down by the dark, silent water where he had first met her, with her face buried in the long, cool grass.

There were no tears now; it might have been better had there been.

Abel and his wife were sorely troubled about her.

"Love often makes a woman desperate," she thought,

as she listened to the girl's low, quivering sighs. "There is no telling what she might do if left to herself."

Abel had thought her scarcely more than a child: he was amazed at the tragic sorrow that swayed her soul; the haunting look in the dark eyes was terrible to see.

Slowly the thought was beginning to dawn upon Izetta —what if he never came? Ah, God! how was she to live through the suspense?

The week and two succeeding days had slowly dragged away, bringing Izetta no tidings.

She crept slowly back to the flute-maker's home, where Marguirette sat knitting in the twilight, sinking down on a low footstool by her side.

Marguirette knew full well the terrible, heart-rending lesson of disappointment that young heart was learning.

She knew there are times in life when silence is a blessing —this was one of them. At last Izetta broke the silence.

"Mrs. Moore," she said, "*why* do you think my husband does not come to me?"

There seemed to be years added to that young voice; all the sweetness was gone from it.

"My child," replied Marguirette, "God forbid my lips should be the ones to speak that which must give you pain, but it is my duty. You will look back to this moment all the years of your after life, and remember it was my duty to speak."

She could not see how marble-white the beautiful face had grown.

"Izetta," she continued softly, "the world is wicked; there are men who have helped to make it so; there are crimes too dark for young minds to fully comprehend; but the cruelest of all crimes is the blighting of innocent girlhood."

Izetta's lips parted, but no sound issued from them.

"There are men," continued blind Marguirette, sadly, "who are attracted to a pretty face; beauty is often a fatal gift, child, the voice is tender, the smile sweet. I have not wondered they win the love of young girls, but the folly does not rest there, Izetta; they soon tire of them; can you think what would happen then, child?"

"No," came the girl's answer, in a low voice, something like the truth of Marguirette's meaning flashing across her brain.

"They too often tire of a light, romantic love, and with a smile on their lips, or a kiss on their cheeks, they leave them. Heaven pity the poor, unprotected innocents! They never return, Izetta, never. May Heaven pity the heart of her who waits; they never come, child."

"It cannot be so with Alderic," sobbed the girl; "I am

his wife, Mrs. Moore, surely that makes a difference. Why did he marry me if he meant to desert me?"

"Abel tells me you are fair to look upon. He was young and reckless; your beauty was the fatal rock; it was admiration, not love."

Izetta recalled her husband's every word and look. She did not remember the words, "*I love you*," ever to have crossed his lips.

"Surely God would never be so cruel to me," moaned the girl passionately, "when I love him so. Ah! Mrs. Moore, I did not know then my life was so bound up in his. Alderic is the other half of my soul. I could not live my life out and know I should never look upon his face again," she cried, vehemently.

"Others have lived through sorrows just as deep and dark, my child."

"There never could have been a life so dark and desolate as mine," wailed Izetta; "first my beautiful young mother was taken from me, then my father, and next my patient old grandfather. I had always been so good, so dutiful, why was I left all alone to suffer so? My husband's love was all I had to comfort me. Can you tell me why that was denied me too?"

"God knows best, child."

"I cannot believe he could be guilty of such a wrong, Mrs. Moore! if you had only known Alderic, you would have felt how impossible it would have been for him to deceive anyone. I have heard him say again and again: 'his honor was his shield.'"

"Alas! alas! poor child, how little he cared for *your* honor," sighed the flute-maker's wife, sorrowfully. "You will wonder, child, why I have so little faith in the promises of men. Do you see a motto with the simple word 'mother' worked in worsted flowers, that hangs on yonder wall?"

"Yes," answered Izetta, pressing the worn hand she held.

"That was my Amy's handiwork; she was my only child. You cannot know the depths of mother-love, Izetta: you cannot realize how I loved my only child—I worshiped her, I often think that is why God took her from me. Amy was fair and good—she was just about your age when the dark cloud of her life settled over her. Love caused it all, Izetta—love caused it all.

"This was the way it came about. A stranger was riding through Silvernook when, opposite this gate, his horse slipped and the rider fell. We took the stranger in and cared for him. They told me he was young and handsome; but I took no heed; it did not strike me *then* as strange.

"He lingered, after he recovered, many a day—I shall never forget the day he left. As the night came on, I missed my Amy I cannot describe to you the agony of that day. Abel found a note in Amy's room saying she had gone with the handsome stranger. 'We are to be married this very day, mother dear, and in a few short weeks we will return to you.'

"All the long days that followed, I sat with my face to the wall; darkness shrouded my eyes, but a darkness more bitter than death shrouded my soul. In all the long months that followed, no word came from my child. Heaven alone knew what sorrows surrounded Amy; still I held my faith with God. When Amy's sorrows are greater than she can bear, she will come back to her poor old mother's arms, I said.

"When she was a little child, she found shelter on this breast; she knows her mother's love will prove faithful to the last, though all else fail her; if harm befalls my child, she will come to me.

"I was right," continued the poor old blind woman, softly; "one night as I sat in this same chair, I heard soft footsteps creep close up beside me, and a stifled sob. Two soft arms stole round my neck, a tired head fell on my breast, and a voice, I scarcely knew was Amy's, sobbed:

"'Do not censure me, mother, I have come home to die.'

"'What of your husband, Amy?' I cried.

"'Do not speak of him, mother.'

"Little by little she told me all; of the morning they had left, and of the little, dwarfed minister who had married them in the morning light—of the few short weeks that had been like a dream of Heaven to her. Then came the horrible awakening. Saying 'he would soon return,' he left her. He never returned; instead, he wrote her a letter which broke her trusting heart, confessing that the marriage she so fully believed and trusted in was no marriage, that the dwarf who married them was no minister. A bank-note was inclosed in the letter, which read:

"'I would indeed undo the past if it was in my power, Amy, but it is too late. I cannot. Go back to Silvernook, Amy, and forget me.'

"Poor child, she came back to her mother's love, but she never forgot him—she died with his name on her lips. You can see a grave, a little white cross beneath the trees. That is Amy's grave. Her poor old father never was the same. His heart is buried in Amy's grave.

"The name of our child has seldom been spoken since between us; our sorrow is too deep for words. Now you will

understand, Izetta, how my heart yearns toward you—how I would shield your trusting heart from every cruel stab."

Izetta laid her head on Marguirette's shoulder.

"She was young, as I am," she said. "She could not live without her love, I cannot live without mine."

"She might have lived," answered Marguirette, "had she come to me for comfort when the first stab of grief fell upon her. She pined away for want of a loving word of courage and strength. You must look to God to be righted, if you have been wronged, my child. Promise me you will look for guidance up there."

"I cannot believe I have been so wronged, Mrs. Moore. I solemnly believe it was a minister of God who married Alderic and me."

"There are others, child, who have been just so trustful."

"Mrs. Moore," said Izetta, solemnly, "in Heaven I have an angel mother. She could not have allowed a crime so dark to fall on her helpless child. I have never done a single wrong for which I should atone."

"Alas! it is the good who seem to be called upon to suffer most," said Marguirette, sadly.

"I shall always believe I am his wife in the sight of Heaven and in the sight of man," said Izetta, firmly. "That is the one great thought that will help me to bear my life bravely. It may be with me as it was with your poor Amy. He may have ceased to love me, but for all that I believe I am his lawful wife. The world shall proclaim it. I never could die with the least stain clouding the name my mother gave me in all its purity. I shall know no rest until I have sought my husband out, and he has said, that all the wide, wide world may know it,

"'This is Izetta, my wife.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

A HEART PANG.

Soon another fact became apparent to Izetta; she must not remain longer under the flute-maker's roof.

Abel's scanty earnings scarcely provided the necessaries of life for himself and wife; she must not add to their burden.

She made one more effort, with Abel's help, to find the former old nurse of her husband; the endeavor proved useless.

"I have known everyone in Silvernook this many a year. I never knew but two who were nurses; one was good old Auntie Becket, as we used to call her; she died full forty years ago. Then there is Mrs. Ryegate, who, in her early

days lived up at Ulvesford Mansion, but never anywhere else, so 'twas not she. No one hereabouts ever heard of a Mr. Ross! Ah! child, there is too deep a mystery here for honest country folk like us to probe."

"Shall I have to give up the search?" asked Izetta, pitifully, sick and weary at heart.

"I don't see what else you can do," replied Abel. "Could you pick up a grain of sand and fling it into that rushing river, with the hope of finding it again? He has gone out of your life, child. There is nothing left you but to forget."

"If I only could forget!" she sobbed, passionately. "Why, the soft wooing of the breeze against my cheek reminds me of his voice; the very trees, the flowers, and birds, whisper of nothing but him. I might not know the difference between one grain of sand and its mates, but, oh! Mr. Moore, my love would teach me by its sweet thrillings, when Alderic is near me; he is like none other."

"Was there ever a love so grand, so passionate, so sublime as this was?" thought Abel, in simple wonder; he could not comprehend its great depths.

One great prayer rose up from Abel's heart that these two should never meet, if, perchance, fate e'er willed it otherwise. He trembled for the young girl standing there, so beautiful, so passionate, so loving; he little knew what lay in store for her.

Izetta began to look around her, wondering what she should do.

Those little white hands were unused to toil, other than the pleasant task of drawing the sweetest melody from piano, harp, or guitar.

Her grandfather had been wont to say that her voice alone was a fortune to her.

Alas! alas! it was worse than useless to her in time of need.

"What use have we for teachers of music?" the simple folk of Silvernook had said to her, "with such great masters as the birds, the brook, and the great sighing trees? Your voice is sweet, like the music of silvery, chiming bells, but we are content with our own."

"Is there nothing I can do?" cried Izetta, turning her white face to the fleecy clouds. "Father in Heaven! which way shall I turn? Without home or friends, where shall I go? what shall I do?" Many a time had the good old parson of Silvernook watched that beautiful, wistful face as she hurriedly passed his cottage to greet the approaching train, noting the woful tears and the agony in the dark eyes, as she slowly and sadly retraced her steps.

He had deeply pitied her, wishing he knew her history,

He was sure some great sorrow had crept into her life, and he longed to comfort her.

Izetta shrank from repeating to him the sad tale, which caused everyone who had heard it to gaze at her in such sorrowful pity, with the words, "poor child!' upon their lips.

"I must find something to do," she told the parson. "I am all alone in the world; home, friends, or money, I have none. Can you tell me, sir, what I can do?"

"You are very young, my child," replied the pastor, slowly; "the world calls for experience, and experience goes with age. I will see what I can do for you; still, I can give you no hope as to the results."

"Perhaps I might teach the village school, or something of that kind," suggested Izetta.

The Rev. Dr. Morleigh shook his head.

"Miss True is twice your age," he said, "and she finds her task no light one."

"Perhaps I could find some one who would engage me for lace-work."

He shook his head; there was no one in Silvernook who required such services.

She could not spin, neither could she knit; these were the principal industries of the village.

She had invested her little store in an advertisement as governess, in an adjacent city paper, but nothing had come of it. She had dispensed with all the pretty ornaments her husband had given her, waiting patiently in the hope that some one would want her who read that advertisement, but all in vain; only the plain gold band Alderic had placed upon her finger, remained.

"I would not part with that," she told herself, "if I were to die of hunger; when I gaze upon it, this little band reminds me, even though deserted, that I am an honorable wife. I have done no wrong; this must be my passport to Heaven."

One day the pastor sent for Izetta; he had said she must not hope; yet why had he sent for her so suddenly?

She lifted the latch of the cottage gate and entered.

Dr. Morleigh was among his flowers, carefully pruning the dead leaves and withered tendrils.

"Would there were gentle hands to prune away all that is harmful from the buds of life's garden," he thought, as he looked up benignly upon seeing who his visitor was. He never forgot the mournful expression of the beautiful eyes that searched his face so eagerly for one ray of hope.

"Sit down, my dear," said Doctor Morleigh, motioning to a rustic garden seat beneath a spreading cedar; "I have news for you."

For one brief instant the hope that it might be from Alderic, her husband, rose in her heart.

A tide of color rushed across the white face, her breast heaved, and her little white hands were clasped convulsively together.

"It is about a situation," continued Doctor Morleigh, cheerily.

He wondered why the young girl leaned so wearily back against the cedar tree.

The white lids closed over the dark eyes, and all the bright color left the delicate face; he thought, in his honest heart, the good news had been quite too much for her.

"I have grave doubts, however, as to whether you will be able to fill the position, my dear. I do not refer to your capability, but your age, child, will be a serious drawback."

"If I were only older how much better it would be for me," sighed Izetta.

"Ah," replied the minister, softly, "those who have the weight of years upon their brow cry out in the bitterness of their soul, 'If I had but youth again what would I not do?'"

He looked at the fair face, more gloriously beautiful than an artist's dream, and thought how many of the grand ladies he had known would give princely fortunes for a face like that.

"You are not much more than sixteen, are you, child?" he asked.

"Not much more, sir; sixteen and a few months."

"There are not many of Madame Root's pupils below that age," he reflected: "a serious drawback, indeed. You speak your native tongue, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, sir; my grandfather took the greatest of pains with my French and music."

"Could you give a recommendation from the school you last attended, as to qualifications?"

"I never attended a school, sir. My grandfather was my only teacher; it was the one bright dream of his life that I should master the languages and music perfectly."

"I will give you a letter to Madame Root; you can do no more than apply. Hush," said he gently, as Izetta was about to speak, "you must not talk of failure; if that is what you were about to say, until after you have first tried. It is a sad thing in life when light-hearted youth first finds out the terrible reality of the words: 'I have striven hard, but alas, I have failed.' Madame Root is a wise woman and will judge wisely at all events, I am sure. I have known the lady well for many a year, and I have

asked, as a special favor to myself, that she will give you full opportunity of testing your abilities."

"Oh, sir, you are more than kind," sobbed Izetta; "how can I ever sufficiently thank you?"

"By not attempting it. I am but a humble instrument in the hands of God. Thank Him for all things."

He placed a sealed envelope in her hands, advising her to peruse it before she started, that she might be familiar with the duties which might be assigned her.

"Should I prove satisfactory to madam, there is one request I would like to ask of you," said Izetta, still lingering in the path.

"Speak out, my child; never hesitate in good thoughts."

Izetta drew nearer to where he stood; the little, soft, white hand she laid upon his arm trembled as the sweet voice whispered, hesitatingly;

"If any one—a stranger, I mean—a gentleman—should come to Silvernook and inquire for me, will you please tell him where I have gone, sir?"

The hand which held the pruning knife fell to his side, and the keen blade severed a white blossom from the bush in its descent, falling in the dust at his feet.

The old man looked Izetta full in the face.

"I will not question you," he said; "but if I were to promise you this, can you answer me truthfully—would it be a just action? Your motive is strictly a true one?"

"You need have no fear, sir," Izetta answered; "Heaven would bless you for such a kind action to me."

Still the thought troubled the old minister; he pondered over these words long and earnestly after Izetta had gone.

Was this the key that solved the hidden sorrow of this beautiful young girl's past?

The question greatly troubled him; he could not tell why.

CHAPTER XV.

THE COLLEGE OF MUSIC.

THERE were tears in the eyes of the good old flute maker and his wife, when Izetta told them of the situation the minister hoped to procure for her at Madame Root's, in a neighboring city.

"God bless you, my child," whispered Marguirette, as she folded the young girl to her heart. "Always remember, if you find the world too cold and stormy, you shall have a place by our hearthstone, humble though it be. You have been with us scarcely a fortnight, yet we love you very dearly; you will not forget us, Izetta?"

Izetta sobbed as if her heart would break. Forget those

two kind souls who had cheered her so patiently through her dark sorrow? Never! never while life lasted.

She looked around upon the quiet hills and vales that had silently witnessed the great tragedy of her life. She laid her hand tenderly on the mossy stone, beside which Abel had first found her, murmuring softly;

"I shall never forget how this spot looks; 'twas here my heart broke."

The tender violets swayed by the evening breeze, lowly bent their purple heads earthward as if in sorrow because she had said farewell to them.

As Izetta sat in the doorway of the little cottage, which on the morrow she should leave perhaps forever, she thought of the letter the minister had given her, with the request that she should make herself aware of its contents at her leisure.

As she opened the envelope something fluttered to her feet.

Heaven bless the kind old parson; it was a bank-note for a small amount, which would enable her to defray the expense of her journey.

"If you never repay me perhaps I may find the interest which collects from a worthy deed *up there*."

The letter to Madame Root spoke of her as "Miss Rienzi." Then it occurred to her she had not told her kind benefactor she was married.

She thought she had explained to him that Rienzi was her grandfather's name, not her own.

She fully meant to make these facts known to Madame Root, however.

"Will you promise me," asked Marguirette, holding the little white hands in her own for the last time, "no matter what you are called upon to suffer in life, should you in the years to come ever meet *him*, promise me that you will do nothing rash?"

For a moment only Izetta hesitated.

"I give you my promise, Mrs. Moore," she said.

She little knew under what trying circumstances that sacred promise made to the blind, would forcibly return to her.

A few hours later Izetta, traveling-satchel in hand, alighted from the hack in front of a spacious, imposing edifice, which announced to the public in golden letters over the arched doorway: "College of Music."

Izetta's heart sank within her, as she gazed up at the tall marble building, with its long, narrow, coldly-staring windows, its gables and turrets.

She would have sat down on the stone steps and cried, had it not been for the passers-by.

She asked herself why everyone stared at her in such wonder.

She never once dreamed it was her wondrously lovely foreign face that caused the ladies who passed her by to look so coldly on the beautiful, forlorn girl, and the men to pause in unfeigned admiration, taking a lingering backward glance as they pursued their journey.

Izetta ascended the marble steps and timidly rang the bell, clutching the Rev. Dr. Morleigh's letter nervously in her hand. A tidy waiting-maid answered the summons.

"I should like to see Madame Root, if you please," said Izetta.

"Surely *you* are not the music-teacher madam was expecting from Silvernook?" asked the maid, curiously.

"Yes," answered Izetta, simply, and she wondered why a suppressed giggle shook the girl's frame, as she ushered her into the reception-room to await madam's appearance.

Like the exterior, the interior of the house was imposing in its stately appointments; no unnecessary article found lodgment there; an air of stiffness pervaded the elegance of the establishment, which struck a cold chill to Izetta's heart.

"All brightness and joy have gone from me," she said to herself. "I shall try to wear my life out as patiently as I can."

She was so young to have had such thoughts.

So intent was Izetta with her own thoughts she did not hear the measured thread of approaching footsteps, nor the rustling of a stiff silk dress as it swept over the thick carpet.

"You wished to see me, I believe?" said a hard, metallic voice at her elbow.

Izetta raised her eyes like a startled, timid fawn to the speaker's face.

"I had thought you wished to see *me*, madam," she replied.

Madame Root looked at the shrinking young girl before her in unfeigned astonishment.

"Surely *you* are not the person I was expecting from Silvernook?" she asked, interrogatively.

Izetta bowed, placing the letter of Rev. Dr. Morleigh in her hands.

She never forgot the angry, ominous frown that crossed her face.

Once, twice, even a third time she carefully perused its contents. Izetta watched the hard, set face, thinking on what a slight thread hung her hopes of remaining at the college. She was quite expecting the stern lips to decide against her.

"Of course, I can give you a trial to test your abilities," said madam. "Yet it is utterly useless to think of engaging you for the position you seek; it requires a person older than yourself, more dignified, and commanding."

Again those words sounded like a death-knell in the girl's ears.

"You have a good knowledge of vocal as well as instrumental music, I presume?"

"Yes, madam."

"What is your voice?"

"Soprano," answered Izetta.

"That is quite against you," replied madam. "We were in need of a contralto voice. Step this way, miss," she glanced rapidly at the letter she held in her hand, "Miss Rienzi, step this way if you please; it may as well be said I gave you the trial asked for."

She led the way to the music-room, which, at that hour of the morning was quite deserted.

A grand piano stood open; it seemed like a dear, old, familiar face to the girl.

"Your own selection," said madam, briefly, waving her to be seated. "I must ask that it may be short."

For an instant the white fingers ran lightly over the keys. Izetta had never sung since the night of her grandfather's death.

As she sat there, the ship plowing through the dark waters, tipped by the silvery light of the stars, and the moonbeams drifting through the fleecy clouds, rose up before her. Again her lips took up the sad, sweet strain.

There was a low, subdued trill in the great, wide room, then the young, sweet voice broke forth in all its wondrous melody, like a yearning soul, first in hope, joy, and gladness, gradually dying away to subdued despair.

Izetta was thinking of Alderic, the lost love of her heart and soul; then the room filled with the most pathetic wailing that ever broke forth in the power of song.

The room was quite empty when they had entered it; now it was crowded with a breathless throng.

As the last notes of that wondrous young voice died away, a young girl with a sweet, sad face, framed in wavy, auburn hair, fell in a swoon at Izetta's feet.

Those who lifted her never forgot the glorious light that lit up the white face.

Silently the throng dispersed.

Izetta and Madame Root stood facing each other—quite alone.

Madame Root understood at once why Doctor Morleigh had sent this young girl to her.

"If she were only older," thought madam.

She recognized Izetta's wonderful talent would be a valuable acquisition to the college; her extreme youthfulness alone was against her.

She motioned Izetta to a seat, touching sharply a call-bell lying on the table.

"Send Miss Glendyke to me," she said to the servant who answered the summons.

A few moments later that lady appeared.

There are faces which attract or repel us at a single glance. Miss Glendyke's face was undeniably one of the latter.

She was a woman who might have passed for youthful, but a keen observer could detect in the hard expression of the face that she was probably on the shady side of thirty; she was of medium height, slightly inclined to portliness; her black hair was curled low upon her forehead, brought back into a double coil at the back of her head, fastened with a very long, narrow silver comb worn lengthwise.

There was no color in her pale face, and its expression was at all times disagreeable; her mistaken idea of dignified pride.

Miss Glendyke's eyes, cold, searching, and merciless, fell upon the desolate young stranger; it was plainly evident that there would never be friendship between them. For one brief instant their eyes met; cruel, harsh Miss Glendyke's, and innocent, trusting Izetta's.

There was a brief conversation carried on in a low key hurriedly between Madame Root and her principal.

"I may be in the wrong, as you say," Izetta heard Madame Root say, "still I am determined to try her for at leasta quarter."

Miss Glendyke's lip curled contemptously, and she shrugged her shoulders ominously, making a parting suggestion in a deep, coarse voice, as she swept from the room.

Izetta never afterward saw a hateful curl of the lip but she unconsciously associated it with disagreeable Miss Glendyke.

"I have concluded to try you for one quarter, Miss Rienzi," madam said in her slow, impressive way; "if mutually agreeable at the expiration of that time, I may re-engage your services; although without references from former instructors, I take you upon the Reverend Doctor Morleigh's recognizance."

Izetta hardly knew whether she felt happy or very sorry. If anyone had spoken just one kind word to her at that moment, the chances are that she would have burst into tears.

Twice she attempted to tell Madame Root that she was not Izetta Rienzi, but Izetta Ross. The words froze on her

lips; she dared not tell her pitiful sorrow to the cold woman before her.

"Perhaps it will be as well as it is," she sighed, wearily.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CLASS OF THE "PRETTY TEN."

SOON after the same maid that had shown her to the reception-room appeared to conduct her to her apartment.

"Your dinner may be served in your room to-day," called Madame Root, coldly; "to-morrow morning I should like you to come to the music-room early, that I may assign you your duties."

"Yes, madam," replied Izetta, as the woman turned haughtily away.

"Did you say," asked the lingering maid, her hand on the door-knob, "Madame Root had engaged you to teach music here?"

"Yes," answered Izetta, wearily.

"Did Miss Glendyke see you, miss?" queried the girl.

"Yes," responded Izetta.

"Well, well," muttered the girl, "that is the strangest thing I ever did hear of."

"What is it that is so strange?" asked Izetta.

"Won't you never breathe a word of it if I tell you?" asked the girl, re-entering the room and closing the door softly after her.

Izetta smiled; she was very glad of even the maid's chatter to divert her thoughts even for the moment from her own sad thoughts.

"You see, miss, it's just this way here," commenced the maid, mysteriously. "All the people in this whole institution are a mean set, if I do say it."

"Hush," remonstrated Izetta, in a pained voice, "you should not talk so."

"But it's so all the same," reiterated the girl, stubbornly; "why, there's never a new teacher comes here but she's abused in a shameful way; the nicer she is and quiet, the more she's talked about and picked on," continued the girl, with a sidelong look at the beautiful face; "that's why they're always wanting more talent here, as they call it, You can hear a good deal of talk about getting in new scholars and needing 'em, but I tell you it isn't that; they can't get no teacher to stay, and it's all that Miss Glendyke's fault, the hateful old thing," cried the girl; shaking her forefinger warningly. "She's the worst of the lot; she sets 'em up against a body from the first. All I've got to say is, I'd look out for her if I were you."

With this parting advice, the girl quitted the room, and

Izetta was left to the contemplation of her own confused thoughts.

She stretched out her hands with a low, bitter cry, the one great cry of her life issuing from her white lips.

"Oh, Alderic, my love, my husband, where are you?"

The tea which was sent up to her remained untasted; it was not the hunger of the body but of the heart which Izetta felt most keenly.

She rose early the next morning, donning one of her plainest dresses, a dark silver-gray that fell in graceful folds about her shapely form, and her dark curls were drawn back by a pearl comb, which was her only ornament.

The picturesque, foreign beauty of Izetta struck Madame Root forcibly as she entered the music-room. Soon after the young ladies of the college took their seats.

By nature Izetta was timid and shrinking; there she sat, the cynosure of all eyes, a sea of curious faces before her; she could see the curling of red lips, the flashing of angry eyes and tossing of heads, even the murmur of their voices was in a measure audible to her from where she sat.

One face only out of that vast throng smiled kindly upon her, the sweet, quiet, sad young girl whose tender soul hed overflowed at her song the previous day. The memory of that smile was priceless to Izetta all the years of her after-life.

"I shall try hard to win their love," thought Izetta, as she listened to their low whispers, which ended in suppressed bursts of laughter.

There was rebellion in their hearts and war in their faces. She might as well have attempted to govern the fiery lava of Vesuvius as stayed the torrent of their dislike; her very beauty, and the picturesque, large, dark, starry eyes were the main causes of their envy.

They fully determined the young stranger should not have a comfortable time at the College of Music if they could help it.

There was another prime cause; on reception days Madame Root's establishment was crowded with the *elite*, for the pretty young ladies of the College of Music were far-famed, and many a match was made through these reception days.

Many who sat intently studying that exquisite face, so like none other, trembled for their own laurels.

A class of the dullest pupils were assigned to Izetta, young girls who were apt enough at penning *billets-doux*, but who could not, or would not, interest themselves in their music, simply to annoy their young teacher.

Fretful parents complained of the want of attention shown by their daughter. Madame Root was alarmed.

"This state of affairs will never do, Miss Rienzi," she said.

Izetta was in despair.

"Whose fault was it if they would not learn," she cried out to herself in the solitude of her own room.

The class of "the pretty ten," as Izetta's was called, enjoyed their little *ruse* immensely; they even jeered in her face, predicting a turbulent future for her.

Among the visitors at the college on reception days was a wealthy young lieutenant, drawn thither by the galaxy of beauty, he often laughingly declared.

There had been a time when Miss Glendyke's charms had lingered in his memory; but like many another careless young fellow he soon tired of her, and what was to Miss Glendyke the one sweet dream of her life, was to the young officer a few easily-spoken, pleasant words, and quite as easily forgotten.

Vernor Key never thought seriously of any woman, until the sweetest, saddest face he had ever gazed upon burst upon his startled vision.

He meant to win her for his wife, if he could. He had come across this pearl in quite an unexpected fashion.

It was a chilly morning in early winter, Vernor Key strolled leisurely up the marble steps of the college.

It was rather an early hour for visitors, still, as he was quite a favorite, he knew admittance would not be denied him.

The long halls were quite deserted; from where he stood. he had a good view, unobserved, of the music-room beyond.

A young girl sat at the piano, her head drooped over the keys; while beside the instrument, her arms folded across her chest, stood Miss Glendyke.

There was no mistaking the look of fierce hatred she bent upon the girl before her. Vernor Key was completely electrified at the change apparent in her hitherto smiling countenance.

"How abhorrent is the face of an angry woman," he muttered, feeling that he should turn away, but some impulse chained him to the spot.

"You will play the last bar over again, Miss Rienzi."

The white fingers rippled over the ivories, and the sweet, sad strains touched a hidden chord in Vernor Key's heart; the saddest and sweetest that ever fell on a human heart.

"Ha! I thought as much," continued Miss Glendyke, wrathfully; "no wonder that passage sounded unfamiliar to me; how *dared* you insert those variations; answer me, girl!"

The slight figure swayed to and fro.

Vernor could not catch the reply.

"I am in time to frustrate a grand scheme of yours, Miss Rienzi. No doubt you would like to get your name up for a composer, but you shall never build up your triumphs from this establishment," she said, in her coarse, deep, peculiar voice.

In another moment she had snatched the music from Izetta's hand, tearing it spitefully into a thousand shreds.

For one brief instant Izetta's face was turned partially toward him, and the voice, the sweetest Vernor Key had ever heard, faltered, brokenly:

"I am very sorry indeed if I have displeased you, Miss Glendyke; believe me, I never once thought of being known as a composer."

A low, discordant laugh was Miss Glendyke's only response.

"I assure you I was only practicing it for my own amusement," continued Izetta.

"Amusement, indeed! do not trouble yourself with unnecessary explanations. I can see for myself," sneered Miss Glendyke.

"I hope you will forgive me," sighed Izetta.

A look, freighted with such abominable scorn and contempt, Vernor Key never forgot it, crossed Miss Glendyke's face.

"We will waive all that," she said; "by rights I should report this affair instantly to Madame Root. A severe reprimand in the presence of the whole school is what you richly deserve. Leave the room at once, Miss Rienzi, or I may be tempted to change my mind."

The next moment a quiet little figure glided past the spot where Vernor Key sat, quite shaded by the heavy curtains; he knew he was unobserved, for the large, dark, lustrous eyes were suffused with blinding tears that rolled off the long, curling lashes in pearly drops.

That was the first time Vernor Key ever remembered an imprecation to have willfully passed his lips; as he turned savagely on his heel, hurriedly quitting the building, murmuring to himself:

"Woman's inhumanity to woman is certainly heartrending?"

Miss Rienzi—Miss Rienzi, the name had a sweet musical sound to his ears; he was wondering when he should see her again.

The beautiful, foreign face haunted him like a dream.

———

CHAPTER XVII.

A STARTLING EVENT.

LIEUTENANT KEY haunted the college like a shadow.

A bright glow of hope had dawned for a moment in Miss Glendyke's bosom, only to be extinguished as she heard him remark to Madame Root, quite carelessly, "that he should like to be presented to the young lady at the window," indicating Izetta, one reception-day.

"Certainly," said Madame Root, amiably, though at heart greatly annoyed; they had scarcely turned round, ere the object of their conversation was silently and mysteriously spirited from the room.

Miss Glendyke took great care Izetta should never again enter the reception-room during visitors' hours.

How little Miss Glendyke knew that no face save *one* had power to charm the sweet young girl whose absorbing thought was bound up in the husband whom she believed had so cruelly abandoned her.

When a strange voice fell upon her ear, she gazed wistfully at the speaker, to see if it were not he; she sought for him in the midst of crowds; his face, and his alone, was ever before her.

Izetta lived over in her dreams how she should fling herself at his feet, when she found him, and cry out:

"Alderic, my love, my love, do not send me away from you."

Sweet little wife, she was so true to her husband of one short, happy week.

Much to the young lieutenant's chagrin, he never caught more than an occasional glimpse of Izetta.

Thus matters might have stood for many a day had not a singular occurrence happened.

One morning Izetta was standing in a curtained alcove, wondering how long she should have to live like this and how it would all end, when the sound of voices fell upon her ear.

Miss Glendyke and Lieutenant Key sauntered leisurely past her. Every word of their conversation, which seemed commonplace enough, fell distinctly upon her ear.

"How long do you think you will remain abroad?" Miss Glendyke was saying.

"That I really cannot say," he replied.

"That is hardly a definite answer," she replied, laughingly.

"I assure you, I wish I could guide my own fortunes," sighed the lieutenant, thinking of Izetta; "but alas, I cannot; I am quite beginning to despair."

"I can hardly realize that this is your last day in Oxford, for some time to come, lieutenant; I am very pleased to see you remember your old friends in calling to-day."

"I had intended bringing an old friend of mine up to-day, whom I have not seen for years. I do not think you have ever met him."

"I might be better prepared to answer, if you were to tell me his name," she replied, archly.

"His name," repeated the lieutenant, absently, "is—— Ross."

Not another word of their conversation reached Izetta's ears; her heart was in a whirl and her brain on fire; she had great difficulty in restraining herself from rushing out and imploring the young man to tell her where she could find the Mr. Ross of whom he spoke.

"It must be, oh, it must be my husband," she gasped out brokenly to herself; then, like a cold avalanche, the lieutenant's words fell back upon her benumbed heart; "he was going away that very day."

Merciful Heaven! what should she do? With him would depart the knowledge she was wearing her young life out to obtain.

She must think quickly; whatever she decided to do, must be done at once.

Every moment that scudded past, laden with glorious golden opportunities she was losing.

She pressed her cold, clammy fingers to her hot brow. Already he was rising to depart.

She parted the curtains and sped quickly from the room.

"If I could but reach the portico—*first*, I might find an opportunity of exchanging at least a few words with him."

It seemed to her she had waited there long hours, so intense was her excitement; in reality, but a few moments had elapsed.

She heard his quick, springy tread as he approached; she was almost overjoyed to find he was all alone; no one else was in sight.

Lieutenant Key's astonishment knew no bounds upon seeing Izetta appear so suddenly from behind the curtains and vanish from the room.

His first impulse was to follow her with the hope of being able to overtake her.

Fortune favored him; as he neared the portico, he saw her leaning like a statue against one of the marble columns.

Speak with her he must, he told himself, at any cost; and if she smiled—well, upon her smile hung his chances of leaving Oxford the following morning.

There never was a more desperate case than his own, he told himself.

He had expected the dark eyes to droop as he neared the spot where she stood; but the great, dark, eloquent orbs raised so inquiringly to his, almost took his breath away.

Now that he stood almost beside her for the first time in his life, he was at a loss as to what he should say to her.

"If you please, sir, may I speak with you a moment?"

The poor lieutenant stopped short. Surely this was some delicious dream.

Again Izetta repeated her question before he regained sufficient composure to answer her.

"Certainly," he replied; "it will be the greatest pleasure of my life to answer as many questions as you choose to put to me. Shall we return to the reception-room, Miss Rienzi?"

Izetta wondered how this stranger happened to know her name.

"I had rather not, if you please, sir; I would much prefer speaking with you here."

He saw she was quite confused as to how to proceed.

"I—I—could not help overhearing a part of your conversation with Miss Glendyke," she began, nervously.

The lieutenant's face certainly expressed his astonishment, yet he spoke no word.

"You—you—spoke of a Mr. Ross," she went on, hurriedly; "I could not help asking you if you would kindly deliver a message from me to Mr. Ross. I ask it as a great favor, sir."

If a thunderbolt had suddenly exploded at his feet he could not have been more astounded.

"You wish me to take a message from you to Mr. Ross?" he queried, hardly daring believe he had heard aright.

"If you please, sir," answered Izetta, simply, noting the strange expression on his face, and adding, timidly: "If you knew—oh, sir, you could not, would not refuse me!"

The lieutenant actually believed he was losing his senses; he was quite positive his reason was playing a trick upon him.

"You will say to him, if you please, I would like him to call; say to him I have waited so long—so long! No word of reproach shall pass my lips; say I have freely promised that. There will be no blot on the past if he will only come back to me. Will you tell him?" she whispered.

"I will tell him, certainly, all you have said," he responded, slowly; "but——"

The sweet, red lips trembled eagerly, deep flushes coming and going over her white face.

"Do you think he will come to-day?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"Mr. Ross is a courteous gentleman," responded the lieutenant, gravely, "and when I tell him you have so earnestly requested his presence, I have no doubt he will come immediately."

Vernor Key wondered at the ecstatic joy that swept across her face.

He would have given the best years of his life, if a look like that had passed over her face on his account.

"Why does that which we covet most elude our grasp?" he pondered, as he walked slowly down the street, sorely puzzled as to what it all could mean.

All the morning Izetta was extremely nervous, now that the one great longing of her heart was to be suddenly realized; she was bewildered, the air seemed to stifle her.

She never remembered how the hours rolled by as she waited in eager expectancy.

"Would he really come to her?" was the cry that ever and anon broke from her lips, as she listened eagerly at each peal of the bell.

At last the welcome sound fell upon her ear; a moment later the waiting-maid handed her two cards, announcing that the gentlemen awaited her in the reception-room.

She ganced at the cards; one read, "Vernor Key," and the other, "A. Ross."

Izetta fell on her knees, pressing the dear name to her lips and covering it with kisses.

Ah! she must go down to him at once. She wondered how she was to greet him with a stranger's eyes upon her.

"If he had only come alone!" she murmured.

She brushed her dark, glossy curls back from her fair face, little dreaming, as she fastened a few crimson roses in her hair, how exquisitely lovely she looked. She only remembered Alderic had once admired her hair worn so.

She walked down the long, silent corridor like one in a dream; her heart beat tumultuously as she told herself each moment she was nearing her husband.

If he held out his arms to her, she would fling herself into his embrace with a glad, happy cry; if he looked haughtily, coldly upon her, she felt she would die then and there at his feet.

"He might pity me then, and kiss my face," she said to herself.

With these thoughts she turned the knob; the huge oaken door swung heavily back on its hinges.

Hesitatingly she crossed the threshold, her brain in a whirl.

She put out two little, fluttering white hands gropingly and slowly raised her great, dark, starry eyes to the face of—Mr. Ross!

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEMANDING AN EXPLANTION.

IZETTA raised her lovely eyes.

As they encountered those of the gentleman before her, she started back with a low, despairing cry; she was dimly conscious of Lieutenant Key saying:

"Mr. Aaron Ross, Miss Rienzi."

Her white lips parted in a sharp, agonizing cry.

"I have waited so long, so long, and 'tis *not* he," and she fell in a deep swoon at the stranger's feet.

For an instant only the two gentlemen gazed at each other in consternation. Mr. Ross, a kindly, elderly gentleman of perhaps some fifty years, was the first to recover himself and touch the bell sharply, bringing the servants instantly to the room.

"The young lady has fainted," said the lieutenant. "I should advise her wants to be seen to as speedily as possible."

He made some remark about the heat of the room, but the keen attendants were not so easily baffled; they surmised something greatly out of the usual order of things had transpired; perhaps some mystery they could unearth; they meant to probe the affair to the very root.

"I suppose we may as well go," suggested Mr. Ross to the lieutenant. "You see, my dear sir, this is exactly what I predicted; the young lady has undoubtedly made a mistake. I am sorry for the poor child; she felt the disappointment keenly."

"I am completely dumfounded," confessed the lieutenant. "I cannot get at the bottom of this mystery, although I feel there is one."

"It is strange *you* cannot understand this affair," replied Mr. Ross. "From what you told me she had said this morning, and from her present actions, I draw my own conclusions."

"Would you mind expressing them?" asked Vernor.

"Certainly not, but you must remember they are only mere suppositions, and take them for what they are worth. I gather that the young lady has a lover probably of the name of Ross, from whom she has been separated by some means; anyone can see it is an affair of the heart. As she told you, she heard you mention a Mr. Ross this morning;

the young lady jumped at conclusions, which ended in sending for the one whom she supposed was her lover. Maiden's freaks are often hard problems to solve, my dear friend," continued Mr. Ross, sagaciously. "Women in general are hard problems; a man may devote all of his life to the engima to give it up at last. You may take it for granted we never understand them; in fact, I might say, that is their principal charm."

The theory of Mr. Ross was quite lost upon Vernor Key; he had heard but one sentence—Izetta undoubtedly had a lover. If he felt uncomfortable before, with no known rival in the field, he felt doubly so now at the very idea of a prospective one.

If his affairs just then were not in the shape they were, demanding his presence elsewhere, he would have remained in Oxford and settled his chance of winning her beyond a doubt.

The young lieutenant cared for Izetta more than he ever cared to admit to himself.

He had raised Izetta from the floor; for one brief instant the beautiful head had lain against his shoulder; his arms had been about her, and the poor fellow had said to himself, as he gazed down on the lonely face:

"Ah, sweet one, you, and no other, shall be my wife. I should have but one thought in life, that of making you happy. If cruel fate should separate us, I shall go down to my grave unmarried."

Vernor Key meant every word that he said.

Izetta was carried to her room, and Madame Root quickly summoned; each attendant had his or her theory of the matter, and by the time madam reached the scene, matters had assumed alarming proportions.

One servant was quite sure she heard loud, angry words issuing from the reception-room; another had heard a sharp, piercing voice cry out, "'tis he, 'tis he!" while still another hinted in a vague manner of the words he had heard the stranger utter.

Madame Root was intensely annoyed. Straightway Miss Glendyke was summoned, who impaneled quite a jury on the spot.

"Well, well," said Miss Glendyke, emphatically, "there *was* something dark about *some* people's ways."

There was no mistaking the significant look she cast on the still, white face lying against the pillow, as to whom the words "some people" referred.

"We will let the matter rest where it is now, and to-morrow we will fully investigate this matter," said Madame Root, severely, sweeping haughtily from the room, followed by Miss Glendyke, who could scarcely repress her malicious

delight in anticipation of the sweet morsel on the morrow.

None but Becky, the maid, remained behind. She advanced close to the couch on which Izetta lay so white and still.

"Poor little thing," sighed Becky, "how unfit you do look for the knockings about of this world. I knew how they would act to you—I said so from the very first."

She brushed back the dark curls that strayed over the pillow, murmuring:

"It will be a dark to-morrow for you, I'm afraid."

A tear dropped from Becky's honest eyes upon the small, white hand; she hastily gathered up a corner of her gingham apron, and brushed it away.

The action aroused Izetta.

"Is that you, Becky?" she sighed.

"Yes, miss," answered the girl, meekly. "I had something to tell you; I couldn't go away and leave you lying there so white an' still, till I said it."

At that moment a rush of memory brought back to Izetta's mind all that had transpired.

"I must have fainted," she murmured.

"Yes, ma'am, you did," answered Becky.

"I hope Madame Root does not know of it," whispered Izetta, in a startled voice. "Do you think she has heard of it, Becky?"

"That she has, miss," answered Becky, shaking her head, "and it's only this minute, she and that Miss Glendyke left the room."

"What were they doing here?" asked Izetta, in a scared voice. "Tell me about it—tell me all they said."

There was not much to tell, but as Becky repeated it, a faint tinge of color arose in her listener's face.

What the morrow had in store for her, she could not even guess.

The dark, ominous cloud of some coming event was slowly casting its shadows before.

Izetta had gleaned from Becky's conversation that they did not actually know what had caused her to faint.

She was very thankful that Lieutenant Key left Oxford on the morrow; they would never know the cause of her agitation, she told herself. She flushed scarlet when she wondered what the two gentlemen must have thought of her strange behavior; her position was certainly the most awkward one imaginable, how could she explain it? what could she say in her own defense?

That morning her hopes had been so high, now they lay crumbled in ruins at her feet.

Ah! had it been her husband, how different life would have been for her.

"Do you know, Becky," she asked, suddenly, "if Madame Root spoke with the gentlemen who were in the reception-room?"

"No, miss, I am sure she did not. I saw them leave a moment or two after we were summoned."

Izetta felt greatly relieved.

"Can I make you more comfortable, miss?" queried Becky, as if loath to depart.

"No, thank you, Becky, I am doing very nicely."

"If ever you need a friend, miss," said honest Becky, coming a step nearer, "will you come to me? I would do anything in the world for you, miss, indeed I would."

Izetta smiled up into the kind, homely face bending over her, and pressed warmly the girl's work-worn hand.

"Yes, Becky, I will always remember it," she said.

With a pleasant "good-night," the girl left the room.

The next morning dawned bright and clear.

The maple boughs swayed to and fro in the keen, frosty air, nipping the autumn leaves that had left the protecting shelter of the boughs to whirl through the air—red in the sunshine, gold in the shade.

Izetta looked sorrowfully out upon the bare branches, upon which but a few clinging autumn leaves remained.

She sighed as she thought how her poor grandfather had always loved them; how he had murmured:

"As bathed in blood, the trailing vines appear,
While round them, soft and low, the wild wind grieves;
The heart of autumn must have broken here,
And poured its treasure out upon the leaves."

"Poor grandfather," she whispered, "no autumn leaves are drifting o'er your watery grave."

At that moment a servant at the door announced that Madame Root wished to speak with her at once.

Izetta had not forgetten what Becky had said the previous evening, and she was trying to nerve herself for the coming interview.

A few moments later she was ushered into madam's presence.

All hope died out of her heart as before her, in solemn array, sat the full quota of teachers of the college, Miss Glendyke in their midst.

Once again the hope died out of Izetta's heart of telling Madame Root her pitiful story. Her lips were sealed, an icy band seemed pressing around her heart.

It was strange the pitiful pleading in that sweet, young face did not melt the milk of human kindness in those stern, frozen breasts.

There was a set, stoical expression on the faces of that grim circle: no mercy need be expected from them.

Izetta would have fallen had she not clutched the back of a chair for support.

"We, the faculty of the College of Music, have sent for you to demand an explanation of yesterday's behavior; we will hear, if you please, what you have to say for yourself, Miss Rienzi," said Madame Root, slowly, laying stress upon each particular word.

"I—I—ladies," faltered Izetta, beseechingly, glancing from one to the other. "It was all a cruel mistake, I——"

"So we have observed," commented madam, grimly, "a grievous mistake on *your* part."

The quivering lips and tearful eyes of the young girl would have melted hearts of stone.

The hearts of the faculty of the College of Music were made of harder material, invulnerable to pity.

"We are waiting with patience to know the cause of yesterday's disturbance."

"I cannot tell you" said Izetta, respectfully but firmly.

"What!" exclaimed madam, opening her eyes widely; "am I to understand you refuse us an explanation?"

"I would tell you if I could," replied Izetta, in a low voice, "but, oh, madam, I cannot, I cannot tell you more than this. I—oh, believe me, it was all a mistake!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A CRUEL SENTENCE.

"WELL," said Madame Root, impressively, "we have all agreed as to what course should be pursued in case the explanation proved unsatisfactory to us, have we not, ladies?" she added, turning to the calm, grim circle on her left; whereupon each person nodded her head gravely in the affirmative.

"Please do not be hard upon me, ladies," sobbed Izetta, wringing her hands; "I have suffered—oh, so much!"

At this remark each one of the stoical circle glanced knowingly at her neighbor, with a peculiar suspicion of a wink. No one vouchsafed a reply.

"There are some sorrows which enter our lives," said Izetta, plaintively, "which are too bitter to repeat; mine is one of them."

"If I had known there was that which through shame should cause you to remain silent concerning your past life, we should never have given you refuge at the College of Music, should we, ladies?" again addressing the circle, who grimly chorused:

"Never!"

"Oh, madam," cried Izetta, in agony, "do not speak so, I am more sinned against than sinning."

Although innocently meant and innocently uttered, Izetta's words had again condemned her in the hearing of the grim audience; their worst opinions were confirmed by those pure lips.

Madame Root turned slowly and impressively to her confederates.

"I see no other course than the one agreed upon in this case, do you, ladies?"

The ladies of one accord arose slowly, responding metallically:

"We see no other course, madam."

"We have concluded," said madam, slowly, noting the effect of each word on her quivering victim, "that it will be necessary to dispense hereafter with your services, Miss Rienzi. We, the faculty, wish it understood that we have expelled you from the College of Music."

For some moments, Izetta hardly realized the great blow that had befallen her.

Madame Root opened the door with a calm, cold bow.

"The porter will call for your luggage in an hour or two," she said.

Izetta felt all remonstrance was useless; the conversation was at an end.

What else could she do but pass from their presence, a cruel example of woman's inhumanity to woman?

Izetta paused hesitatingly on the threshold.

"If I had a recommendation from you, madam, I——"

"I am forced to courteously but firmly refuse your request," said Madame Root; "I cannot conscientiously recommend to another roof one whom I refuse to harbor beneath my own. Good-morning, Miss Rienzi."

Again the warp of fate was weaving its web closer around her.

She was so young to bear the weight of sorrow, such as was hers.

As she retraced her steps to her own apartment, she met a few of the scholars on the stairway; she noticed they all turned their heads away.

"What have I done?" she asked herself, wearily, "the world is so cruel to me!"

Kind-hearted Becky was her only friend in need.

She could not go back to Silvernook—where could she go, what could she do?

Then a practical idea occurred to her; she would procure a boarding-place and seek for a situation.

She counted over the contents of her purse. Yes, her means were ample for the purpose.

"Where to, miss?" asked the driver, as he mounted the box an hour later.

"I should like to find a nice, quiet boarding-house; do you know of any such?"

He shook his head doubtfully.

"A boarding-place, such as you would like, miss, is pretty hard to find in Oxford. I'm around rather much, an' I'm sure I don't know of any. There's only one place that I can really recommend."

"Take me there, if you please," she answered.

In the course of a half hour, the hack stopped before a neat frame house, upon which was painted in unpretentious black letters, "Intelligence Office," and beneath this a small sign of "Boarding."

Izetta was ushered into a neat little parlor, and in a few moments Mrs. Guth made her appearance.

"What can I do for you, miss?" asked the landlady, in a cheery, bustling way that made Izetta feel quite at home.

"I should like to stay with you for awhile," she replied, "until I procure a situation."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Guth, briskly, "I think I can accommodate you; and, by the way, you have come to just the place you want. I have an intelligence office here, too, with some of the best people in Oxford for patrons, and if there is anybody can get you just the place you want, I am that body."

As she spoke, she looked at the sweet, young face, wondering what sorrow had visited her, for she read a deep tragedy in the dark, sorrowful eyes.

"Of course you have good references, miss?" she said, interrogatively.

"No," replied Izetta sadly, "I have no references whatever."

"I am sorry, miss," she said, "but of course I could not think of sending you to any of my customers without recommendations. If I were to judge from your face, that would be sufficient for *me*, but there are faces that are sadly deceptive—I do not mean offense when I say—I have learned not to trust too much to appearances.

She saw the distressed expression on the wistful face.

"You might remain here a week or so until you looked about," continued Mrs Guth, kindly.

Izetta gladly availed herself of the opportunity, paying for two weeks' board in advance.

"I shall certainly find something to do in that time," she told herself.

Izetta had never been thrown so much on her own resources as now. A long, weary week had passed. Everywhere she had been met with the same reply, no one could

think of engaging her without reference. Often she had been rudely repulsed.

"How dared Mrs. Guth send them a person whom she could not recommend?" they said. "I am afraid I shall have to take your name from my books, Miss Rienzi," she said at last. "I cannot get the ill will of any more of my customers; I really cannot. I have done what I could for you, I am sorry it was without success."

Mrs. Guth was wondering how long she would be able to pay for her lodgings; she was heartily sorry she had taken her in.

Again the last dollar was taken from Izetta's purse.

"I must find something to do, or starve," she told herself.

She looked up at the bright blue sky and fleecy clouds.

"Ah, mother, mother, if I had but you," she cried, "I might bear it patiently!"

Since she had left Madame Root's the word husband had never crossed her lips.

"He has left me to die," she cried out in bitterness, "let me try to forget him."

It was easy to say those words, but only Heaven knew how that young heart yearned for him.

She was so fragile to buffet the wild storms of life.

Izetta knew so little of the ways of the world; still she readily understood that Mrs. Guth would wish her to go at once, when she had no money to pay for her board.

Twice dark thoughts, like grim sentinels, had rushed across her brain.

"I shall end it all to-morrow," she told herself wearily. "After to-morrow I shall never need a recommendation."

She did not ask herself if men would forget, and God would forgive what she so sorrowfully meditated as a panacea for her woe.

As she neared the porch of her humble abode she saw Mrs. Guth in the doorway.

"I have good news for you, Miss Rienzi," she said; "I have secured you a situation."

The swift joy mounted to Izetta's eyes; she looked the gratitude she could not express in words.

"Sit down," said Mrs. Guth, "while I tell you all about it. It is with a very wealthy family, by the name of Hampton—the Hamptons, of Hampton Place, in the suburbs of Newburyport, ten miles from Boston. The family consists of mother and son. The lady is exceedingly peculiar. I cannot explain more to you. She is in want of a companion—it is against my rules, still, in this case I recommended you myself, Miss Rienzi, and she has consented to see you."

She had scarcely ceased speaking when a coach, drawn by two dark horses, drew up before the door.

The equipage was a magnificent one, the only thing which detracted from its appearance was the dwarfish driver, who scrambled nimbly down from his seat, throwing open the carriage door for an elegantly-attired young man whom Mrs. Guth met at the door; the next moment the stranger was ushered into her presence.

Izetta could never explain the strange sensation of horror that stole over her as she raised her eyes, bowing quietly to Heath Hampton's careless nod.

There was a something in the bold glance of evident admiration he cast upon her that caused her heart to flutter like a caged bird against its prison bars.

She noticed he was darkly handsome; still, without knowing why, she felt a great distrust of him.

She also noticed, as he raised his white right hand to his forehead, it bore across it a deep, irregular, livid scar, upon which her eyes rested, strangely fascinated.

CHAPTER XX.

A TERRIBLE WARNING.

THE preliminaries were satisfactorily arranged, and Izetta was soon seated in the coach beside Heath Hampton, whirling rapidly in the direction of Hampton Court.

Then, and not till then, did Hampton's true character begin to show itself, and Izetta noticed, with feelings of horror, that there were fumes of wine upon his breath; it was a rare occasion, indeed, when such was not the case.

"I had no idea," he said, breaking the silence Izetta so persistently attempted to maintain, "my mother had secured such a little jewel of a companion; indeed, I may say for the first time in life I shall envy my own mother such charming society."

Izetta was mentally praying their destination could not be far distant. In her wildest dreams she had never anticipated such a horror as this which was forced upon her.

"If you please, sir," she said, with dignity, "I should be very grateful if you would not talk to me so; I——"

A low, mocking laugh interrupted her.

"I sincerely hope you are not going to be prudish, Miss —Miss Rienzi," he said; "if there is anything I do detest, it is a prude; really, now, prudery does not become fresh, handsome young faces like yours; leave that for homely old maids; my advice is wholesome, I assure you."

Izetta shrank from him, pale with unspeakable horror, scorn, and disgust blazing from her dark eyes, as she pict-

ured to herself—how could she live under the same roof with this man, when she found even the first few moments passed in his society almost unbearable?

"Come, come, Miss Rienzi," he said, "I do hope we are not going to quarrel. I want to become the best of friends with you, if possible."

Heath Hampton, wild and reckless though he was, never forgot the graceful dignity with which the fair young girl drew herself up proudly, as she answered:

"There is one way, sir, and one way only which could command my respect and friendship."

"I should like to be enlightened," he declared, ironically.

"That one way," repeated Izetta, firmly, "is to leave me quite alone."

Heath Hampton opened his eyes very wide.

"Dictated to by my mother's companion," he muttered, under his breath. "Well! well! this is decidedly rich!"

Had he met Izetta under any other circumstances he would have been the pink of propriety, but, as his mother's paid companion, that was quite a different affair; her evident scorn and disgust piqued him.

"I will show her," he thought; "those little airs and graces are lost upon me."

He did not mean to be rude to her, still he meant she should worship at his shrine as the generality of women did.

He told himself that she was really the prettiest piece of prudery he had ever come across.

One thought and one only filled Izetta's mind; how long would she be obliged to sit opposite those bold scrutinizing eyes that seemed to burn tauntingly into her very soul.

Despite her utmost endeavors to maintain her composure, she was trembling like a leaf when the coach stopped.

Izetta scorned his proffered hand, alighting quite without his aid.

Heath Hampton stood gazing after her with a strange expression crossing his wickedly handsome face, and as she disappeared in the hall, he muttered quite inaudibly:

"Ah! why not?"

He had spoken the words quite carelessly, yet there was a pair of keen ears to hear them, and a hissing voice whispered, as Hampton turned on his heel and strode toward the library:

"Never—never, villain, if Vatal can prevent it, you have played your last game, now it is my turn; even the worm will turn when bruised, why shouldn't I?"

In an apartment which had once been luxurious, but was now dingy and worn by age, Izetta was soon ushered. A small, dark little lady half rose as she entered.

"Ah! you are Miss Rienzi," she said, "I have been expecting you."

If the son had made an unfavorable impression upon Izetta, who was slow to judge of like or dislike, the mother formed but a little better one.

She was small and dark, her mouth alone was the only pleasant feature about her. There was a strange, restless expression about the eyes not easily defined nor understood.

Again Izetta's heart sank; she had no thought she would be able to please the critical lady before her.

"You are young," she said in a crisp voice, with that peculiar glance bent full upon her, "and rather good-looking. I will be frank with you, I must say to you I do not like that, it is not well for you; otherwise you will be most suitable. There is one thing I wish to warn you against from the outset; you see, Miss Rienzi, I am candid with you. I do not wish you to ever meet my son."

Izetta was on the point of explaining that that calamity had already happened her, when the lady continued:

"You will have a very pleasant life of it here, if you strictly observe that one condition. I have no doubt we shall be mutually pleased with each other. You will strictly avoid my son, will you not, Miss Rienzi?"

Izetta readily promised to fully obey her instructions.

"I have had apartments fitted up for you in what we call the western wing. Vatal will take you to them," adding, as she touched the bell: "I shall not need you until after luncheon; then you may come to me here."

"I beg your pardon, miss," said the dwarf, stopping hesitatingly at her door, "Mr. Hampton requests you to please not mention having met him, to his mother."

"Why?" said Izetta, hardly knowing what construction to put upon the strange actions which pervaded this house of secrets; "his mother sent him for me herself."

"No," replied the dwarf; "*I* was the one sent. He overheard the message, and would go to see how you looked, miss."

Izetta looked surprised.

"I do not know why that should have interested him," she said.

"It will be best for you, miss, if you never seek to know," replied the dwarf, in a low, earnest whisper.

Izetta felt faint and terrified; she sank down on a chair

when she found herself alone, wondering what it all meant.

"If I only had a little money, I would not rest a night, no, not an hour beneath this mysterious roof."

She could not shake off the forebodings that came over her.

Izetta's duties were not arduous; there was much of the mornings she had quite to herself. The afternoons were spent in reading to Mrs. Hampton.

Izetta greatly wondered at the style of books the lady preferred; there was one book in particular which seemed to captivate her capricious fancy. From "Queen Fredericka's Revenge" she was never weary of hearing selections.

"What is your idea of revenge, Miss Rienzi?" she asked, suddenly, one day, as Izetta closed the book with a shudder.

This was the very question Izetta had asked herself many a time.

"I can hardly tell you," answered Izetta: "I have often heard that revenge is sweet, but I have often thought forgiveness a thousand times sweeter."

"Should you think it strange," said Mrs. Hampton, slowly, "there could be persons who live only in the hope of revenge?"

"I could not imagine such a life, madam," said Izetta, simply.

"Yet, like Queen Fredericka, there *are* such in real life," said Mrs. Hampton, slowly; "they have wealth, position, everything that should make life enjoyable—yet they would forego all this for revenge; it is their dream by night, their thought by day."

"I should pity such people more than I can express," replied Izetta.

The lady laughed a short, hard, bitter laugh, that had a peculiar ring in it, so like the son's.

"Had you experienced the same sorrows in life that some people have, you would not be so sanguine in believing it easy to forgive or forget a cruel wrong."

Izetta's dark eyes wandered afar off across the distant horizon. There were few lives that held such a hidden sorrow as her own, yet no thought of vengeance had crossed her pure mind.

The subject was never resumed between them again.

The first glance at that beautiful, young face, had been the doom of Heath Hampton; he was heedless of all consequences.

He fell to comparing her, quite unconsciously, with Loraine Ulvesford, the fair, haughty beauty, whom he would have married for her money; he little dreamed

what a cruel mockery of fate such a comparison would become.

He had never loved Loraine; her wealth had been the reward for which he had striven; but he loved this beautiful Izetta, with her fair, foreign face, as such a reckless nature as his was only capable of loving—for herself.

He had seen more of life in his twenty-six years than most men at forty.

He had tested to the full, that all knowledge begins with experience.

Izetta had been at Hampton Court only a month, before he succeeded in obtaining another interview with her.

All of his numerous schemes to waylay her in the parlor, the library, or the hall, failed signally; she never ventured anywhere where there was the least likelihood of his presence.

Affairs should not go on in this way much longer, he promised himself.

Fortune favored him quite unexpectedly.

One evening, as he entered the library, his quick eye detected a small, dark-robed figure in the further corner of the room.

"Ah! Miss Rienzi," he said, with a curious smile on his lips, "I have long awaited just this opportunity."

Izetta would have passed him, but he coolly placed himself before her.

"Not until you have listened to what I have to say," he said.

"Let me pass, if you please, sir; I have no wish to hear you," she replied.

"Probably not, still you will favor me by listening, all the same. You have mistaken me from the very first, Miss Rienzi. I am a dangerous man to be trifled with. I am frank with you; my follies are many and my virtues few; my will is my law. You are the first woman I have ever met whom it was possible for me to love; for that reason I have decided to make you my wife."

"Sir?" cried Izetta, "this is outrageous. I will not listen. Allow me to pass, or I will call for assistance."

"From whom would you expect to obtain it?" he asked, sarcastically, his face was growing livid with passion. "Have a care, girl!" he cried, "you and you alone might have made of me what you would—if I cannot win your love I swear none other shall! I come of a passionate race, quick to love and as quick to hate! I would win you in spite of the whole world—in spite of yourself. I love you too madly to have a care as to that."

Izetta held up her hands to stay the mad torrent of his

vehement words; her heart fluttered wildly; by a great effort she restrained herself from swooning at his feet.

"Never," she cried, "I would never marry you. I could not. I would die first."

"Shall I tell you why you shall?" he said, quietly, his hot breath scorching her face, his mocking eyes gleaming down into her own.

He whispered but a few words in her ear, yet those few words produced the most startling effect upon her.

Izetta would have fallen, had he not stretched out his hand and caught her.

He opened the door, with a low bow, for her to pass.

"Think well of what I have said, Miss Rienzi; I shall await your answer here to-morrow."

The next moment Izetta was alone.

CHAPTER XXI.

LOST IN THE SNOW.

LONG after the door had closed behind her, Izetta leaned against the balustrade in the corridor, her white face buried in her hands, wildly asking herself if it was not a dream from which she must soon awaken.

"It cannot, oh, it cannot be true," she moaned. "Heaven could not be so cruel to me!"

Alas, she knew not which way to turn from her own mad thoughts.

"Oh, mother! mother!" she cried, throwing open her window, "what shall I do?"

The dark night gave back no answer, save the low moaning of the wind among the towering pines. No friendly star pierced the frowing face of the heavens.

Izetta leaned far out on the casement; the great, white snow-flakes drifted down upon her agonized face, but they did not cool her fevered brow.

She laid her hot cheek against the little hand which wore her marriage-ring, bitter, scalding tears falling upon it.

"Oh, little ring," she cried, "if you could only tell me where my husband is to-night."

She closed the window with a shudder.

It was the night before Christmas Eve. A bitter storm was setting in; the snow-drifts covered hill and valley in their cold embrace; the winds, freighted with their icy burden, howled dismally, and the shutters creaked, as they swung restlessly to and fro on their hinges, yet the darkness and the storm without were nothing to the storm of agony that raged in Izetta's heart as she paced to and fro.

"Grandfather, grandfather!" she wailed, "this never would have happened, if you and I had never left sunny Italy."

But a few fleeting months had passed since then, yet it seemed to the friendless girl who stood there, alone in the greatest sorrow her young life had ever known, as if long years had flown.

She remembered but too well the vow that had been made to her grandfather, as the steamer plowed through the dark, seething waters: she could hear again those words, as if spoken by an honest heart:

"I will protect Izetta, come what may."

How had that sacred trust to the dying been fulfilled? Alderic had doomed her to the coldest, most pitiless neglect.

The poor young wife, scarcely more than a child, flung herself wildly on her knees, imploring Heaven to tell her why he had married her, if he meant to desert her. He had married her of his own free will.

"Ah, Alderic, Alderic!" she wailed, "my sorrow is greater than I can bear!"

Those last words sounded mockingly which Heath Hampton had tauntingly uttered:

"I will wait until to-morrow morning for your answer; if you consent we will leave Hampton Court together at once; if you refuse, the consequences shall mock your folly."

Izetta little realized the resources of which a desperate man was capable.

Ruin and disgrace stared the poor, innocent, hapless young wife in the face.

On the morrow she would be spurned from their door with scathing contempt.

"What have I done," she wailed, "that fate should weave such a terrible web about me?"

She was so guiltless of the dark ways of the world; her heart was as pure as the snow-drifts out there.

Like a gleam of hope across her benighted soul, rose the calm, peaceful faces of blind Marguirette and the good old flute-maker.

"If I could only get back to Silvernook," she thought, "she would not turn me from her door—other refuge I have none."

Then a terrible fear seized her; what fierce alternative, what terrible revenge would Heath Hampton take on that to-morrow, of which she hardly dared trust herself to think.

Once again she went to the window, peering out into the dark, wild night.

"If I only dared," she murmured.

The more she thought of that morrow that in a few short hours would dawn upon her, despair sank deeper in her heart.

If she fled from Hampton's home, there and then, would not the son pursue her? It was her last chance; she made a desperate effort to calm herself, and quickly donning cloak and hood, she sped noiselessly down the long, dark corridors, out into the storm and the night; swift as a shadow she threaded her way through the snow-drifts and beneath the friendly, leafless trees, until she reached a pool, lying dark and silent in its snowy bed, the white drifts shrouding its dark outline; where solemn owls uttered their piercing cries, and flocks of ravens fluttered. The snow-flakes fell tremulously upon its dark waters, and were silently gathered into its cold, glassy bosom.

Izetta felt no fear, as she knelt down on the brink.

"One plunge, and all the bitterness of life will be over for me," she muttered.

The snow-flakes fell unheeded on her long, dark hair that blew across and about her face with the piercing storm.

"I am so young to die," she sobbed; "but I cannot bear my sorrow alone. Alderic, Alderic," she wailed, "you will never know how your name was on my lips as the dark waters closed over my head; the silent pool can never tell its story or whisper to you how dearly I loved you!"

The moaning winds took up the wild cry, echoing softly: "I loved you!"

Izetta gathered her cloak closer about her; she closed her eyes, her lips parted in a sweet, sad smile.

"I'm coming, grandfather," she murmured; "coming, coming, sweet mother."

As the words fell from her lips, she started back with a low cry.

Was it the voice of the young mother who had hushed her to rest on her breast, or the night winds whispering sternly:

"What wculdst thou do? Darest thou take into thine own hands the life thy God hath lent thee?"

"Forgive me, angel mother," humbly whispered the young girl, shuddering. "Heaven forgive me; I had not thought of that; the dark waters seemed to hold out their arms for me; the world was so cold and cruel I thought I could find rest there!"

She knelt down, burying her face in the cold snow.

"Forgive me, mother," she sobbed; "I have been so sorely tried."

She raised her dark eyes to the inky heavens above her, praying her angel mother to guide her faltering footsteps.

Slowly she raised herself from her knees and turned her

back to the dark pool that had so nearly engulfed her, pressing steadily onward in the face of the storm, never pausing to look back at the great, dark building she was leaving behind her.

One thought buoyed up her hopes and waning courage: each step brought her nearer the humble flute-maker's abode.

She remembered Hampton Place lay directly midway between Silvernook and a city they had called Boston.

She remembered Silvernook must lie toward the north. There were no stars to guide her; still she told herself she knew the way; she could not miss the road, it could be but a few miles distant.

Izetta watched the first gray streaks of dawn pierce the dull, leaden sky with a grateful heart. All the night long she had pushed steadily onward. It was dark and lonely; she thanked God for the friendly morning light; she could not be far from there, she told herself.

Then she stood still and looked about her. Merciful Heaven! where was she? She never remembered having been in that locality before. She had been so sure she was in the right path, whereas, she found herself in a trackless, boundless sea of snow.

She was the only living being amidst all that vast expanse of frozen whiteness, whose outline was broken, here and there, only by some hardy, bare-banched shrub or tree that rose up darkly from its white, shrouded bed; the cold, white, dreary expanse of snow stretched out on all sides as far as her eye could reach; no path was discernible through the uneven driftings.

For some moments Izetta gazed around her in blank bewilderment; then her lips grew white with a sudden fear.

"I have lost my way!" she cried out in horror.

There was no path before her, and the footprints of her own feet were completely obliterated by the thick, falling snow.

She could not retrace her steps; she sat down in the snow and tried to think.

Izetta was growing quite used to sorrow; unforeseen events were ever thrusting themselves unawares upon her.

She could see the ravens careening about in the upper air above her head. One thought occurred to her:

"Should she ever be able to reach Silvernook?"

She felt cold and benumbed; she longed to lie down in the soft, white snow and rest. Yet she had often heard such rest meant death.

She would try to bear up a little longer.

"Ah, well," she thought, "it does not matter much what becomes of me."

She had not tasted food since the night before, still she did not feel the need of it.

She felt wofully tired and weary, that was all. Ere she was hardly aware, the sun had sunk behind the crimson, western clouds.

The darkness of night would soon fall around her, ushered in by the still heavily falling snow.

Suddenly the chiming of far-off bells fell upon her ear; at first they sounded like church bells; then she remembered that this was Christmas Eve.

As she paused in the twilight, the jingling bells sounded nearer and nearer. A dark speck was skimming toward her from the distant horizon.

Could it be a human being? Her first impulse was one of intense joy, which suddenly gave place to the most pitiful terror.

"What if it should be Heath Hampton?" she thought, trembling like a leaf.

Ah, she could screen herself behind the bushes; if it was no one who might be seeking her, she would cry out to them.

Izetta was not a moment too soon. Nearer and nearer each moment dashed the sleigh and its occupants over the white, crusted snow.

Another instant, and they had reached the very spot where she knelt, screened by the alder bushes! they were so near she could have put out her hand and touched them as they grazed her hiding-place.

Had those panting steeds swerved ever so slightly toward those alder bushes, they must have crushed her.

Now she could see their faces. A voice, hoarse with wrath, which she knew but too well, cried sharply:

"I say she must have come this way; you stupid dolt, to have lost track of the footprints."

"I could not help it," answered a voice, which she instantly recognized as the dwarf's; "the fault is the snow falling so fast, not mine."

Suddenly Vatal drew rein.

"Have you forgotten, sir, you are nearing dangerous ground? Yonder lies Ulvesford Manor in the distance, to the right, there."

His companion uttered a short, hard, mocking laugh, that made Izetta, crouching in her ambush, almost faint with fear.

"I have forgotten nothing," answered Heath Hampton, wrathfully. "Ulvesford knows nothing of my return from abroad. I have succeeded in keeping that a profound secret. I could not wish better luck than to meet him here and now. He has led a charmed life: twice he has

escaped me, once in Switzerland, and once on this very road by the cliff; he shall never escape me the third time. He little dreams of the vengeance which shall soon be meted out to him.

"Fate seems against you of late," answered the dwarf.

"Yes, I'm at the bottom of the wheel now, Vatal," answered Hampton; "but it revolves quickly. "I'll soon be at the top. Dame Fortune dealt Ulvesford the winning cards in gaining the heiress of Lorrimer Hall. Even this dark-eyed little beauty has eluded my grasp. I was so sure—hark! what noise was that?"

The next instant Izetta met the glaring eyes of Heath Hampton gazing fixedly upon her through the branches.

CHAPTER XXII.

ULVESFORD MANSION.

"WHAT noise was that?" again queried Heath Hampton.

"I'm sure I did not hear any," answered Vatal.

"Pshaw!" muttercd the other, impatiently, "I believe I'm growing as fanciful as a woman."

His keen, shrewd eyes had *not* detected the startled, dark eyes, gazing as if fascinated upon him.

"You had better turn about, Vatal," he ordered, "she cannot have gone very far; we will take a short cut across, she must be somewhere about."

The next moment the horses were plunging on through the darkness in an opposite direction.

"Mother," she cried, raising her eyes to Heaven, through her tearles sobs, "I had rather lie cold and lifeless upon the pure, cold snow here, food for the vultures of the air, than breathe the same air with this human vulture, from whom you have saved your child."

The bitter cold and the great mental excitement through which she had so lately passed were beginning to tell upon Izetta's sadly shattered nerves; her garments were white with the fallen snow, and with great difficulty she made her way step by step.

Once she staggered and fell. She was beginning to feel delightfully warm and drowsy; the bitter cold seemed to have passed harmlessly by her. If she could only lie down and rest a few moments, she would feel refreshed directly.

Suddenly the shrill cry of a night-bird circling above her head, partially aroused her lagging energy.

They had spoken of some place at the right; she had walked many miles and found no such place, she had told herself, with a pitiful little laugh that sounded strangely weird among dark trees and waste of snow.

Suddenly the flashing of many lights burst upon her view; for one brief instant she half imagined she was walking down the street of some Italian city upon a gala night. Delightful strains of music fell upon her ear. The music awoke Izetta's soul to consciousness of her position.

Oh! how she strove to reach the lights and the music. A few steps more and she reached the park gate. The sound of revelry was at its height.

Izetta crept up the broad walk, from which the snow had been carefully brushed.

From the great row of windows which opened out upon the arched porch the shimmering curtains were looped back, and the brilliant, rosy light poured warmly out upon the cold, white snow.

Izetta crept nearer and nearer, her dark garments trailing after her.

She could see great throngs of gayly-dressed women, against backgrounds of great banks of roses, who seemed to laugh at the cold, the storm, and the snow without.

Their arms and shoulders, 'neath gossamer tulles, shone like polished marble under the blazing light of the colored chandeliers.

Izetta pressed her white, wild face closer against the window-pane. No one could see her, she told herself; no one would know she was watching out there in the cold and the darkness.

Her long, dark hair, on which the white snow-flakes lay thick, tossed about her face with the breeze. Her dark, sorrowful eyes, like gleaming stars, shone strangely lustrous.

She could have gazed on the scene forever, with never a thought of the cold or the storm. She quite forgot she had intended to inquire of someone the way to Silvernook.

She was riveted to the spot by the mirth and lights within.

* * * * * * *

Loraine Ulvesford intended her first Christmas at home should be a magnificent affair.

An hour before her guests arrived, she stood before her mirror, clasping a diamond bracelet on her white, rounded arm, that gleamed and quivered with every motion with a thousand jets of flame, her proud, haughty mouth was wreathed in smiles.

Loraine was always thinking of her husband when she smiled.

He sat at a little distance from her, his head bent on his hands in a strange fit of despondency, which even she

could not charm away with her witty banter and winning smile.

Suddenly she turned to him.

"Ulmont," she asked, "are you quite sure you are pleased that you married me?"

She was leaning both her elbows on his chair, her lovely eyes gazing up into his own.

"It is rather late in the day for you to be asking such a question of me, Loraine."

She put back the fair hair from his forehead with her soft, white, jeweled hand, answering slowly:

"Ulmont, my husband, I can never feel quite sure of your love for me. Sometimes when your arms are about me, and your lips pressed to mine, I feel a strange sensation, as if a strong hand had suddenly thrust us asunder, and your kisses, while yet warm, seem to grow cold on my lips; there are times you seem so silent and abstracted —why is it?"

"There has ever been a weight on my mind since the accident which befell me; probably some trifling affair, it may be after all."

"Do you think it is the memory of someone whom you have met abroad?" she asked anxiously.

"Jealous, Loraine," he laughed; "it is more likely some message I have promised to deliver for some friend which eludes my memory so persistently."

"You have never loved anyone except me, have you, Ulmont?"

"You do not doubt that you are my first, last and only love, do you, Loraine?"

"No; to doubt you would be death," she answered; "yet, somehow you are not the same; you have seemed so changed since you went abroad. You are not gay and merry as before."

Ulmont laid his handsome head back upon the crimson cushions with a merry laugh.

"How would you have it, my pretty Loraine; if a man's love does not strengthen and deepen under the influence of so peerless a wife as yourself, he may safely be labeled heartless—better have lived a bachelor forlorn."

Still Loraine was not satisfied; she would be the sharer of his every thought.

"I believe I am growing jealous," she said, with a smile; "still I am thankful I have only your thoughts for rivals."

A rival—it was the first time such an idea had crossed her mind.

"If I had ever had a rival in your affections, Ulmont," she said, "I could not have answered for myself."

She was the last daughter of the long line of Loraines;

it had often been said they were never crossed in love. Heaven pity the man who was weighed in the balance of their affections and was found wanting.

Loraine, with a bright glow in her heart, went down among her guests, little dreaming of the terrible web fate was weaving around the husband she so madly loved.

Had her very life been asked as a ransom for his, she would cheerfully have paid it. Those who saw Loraine Ulvesford that night in the glow of her peerless beauty, never forgot her, or the strange occurrence that made that Christmas Eve a memorable one.

Mirth was at its height, intoxicating the sense with rapturous bewilderment. Loraine had given the first waltz to Doctor Stafford; he regretted when it was over.

"It is not often I am favored with so graceful a partner as yourself, Mrs. Ulvesford," he said, gallantly, leading her to a seat in a bower of bending ferns that arched above one of the long, French windows that led out into the porch.

Loraine was about to made some light rejoinder, but the words died away on her lips in a piercing scream which brought the guests hurriedly about her as she pointed to the window.

There, crouching close against the dark pane, they beheld a white, wistful, beautiful face, framed by long, dark, disheveled hair, and gleaming, mournful eyes.

The white, cold snow on the ivy vines, and the long, glistening icicles formed a weird background that struck a subtle fear to the hearts of all who gazed.

In an instant flashed across Loraine's mind that beautiful, foreign face that had haunted her so strangely in the vine-covered Alps.

The gentlemen had started out to search for the owner of the face which, when observed, had instantly disappeared.

Loraine looked around for Ulmont; he was not among them. She heard strange murmurs from the porch without.

"Keep the ladies back," the gentlemen were saying; but the ladies would not be kept back; they would know all about the disturbance.

Loraine, heedless of shawl or wrap, made her way out to the group hovering around some dark object lying upon the snow.

The gentlemen entreated her to return to the house.

"You will catch your death of cold, Mrs. Ulvesford," they urged; "see, you are shivering now."

As Loraine persisted in seeing what was the matter, the group silently made way for her.

There was something in the still beauty of the white upturned face lying there that touched a deep chord in Loraine's heart, as she knelt down in the snow beside her.

In after life people often spoke, who witnessed that sight, of the strange contrast they made. Loraine in her robe of velvet, the flashing lights quivering on her flaming jewels and on her golden hair, and the slight, delicate figure lying there wrapped in the dark, snow-covered cloak, the sweet face, perfect as if carved in marble, on which the dark, silken lashes lay, seemed the face of a child; there was a pitiful expression about the mouth, hard to see on one so young.

"Where is Doctor Stafford?" called Loraine.

"I am here," he responded, promptly; "I have forced some wine down the poor creature's throat; she will soon recover, Mrs. Ulvesford."

"Why is she not brought into the house?" asked Loraine.

"I have ordered a carriage to have her removed to the hospital," replied the doctor; "little good comes of harboring people of this kind in one's home."

There was something appealing in the still, white face that made the heart of Ulmont Ulvesford's wife warm unconsciously toward her.

It was a strange fate which lead these two women together, these two who so passionately loved the same husband—the bitterest of rivals.

"The child must be brought into the house, for the present, at least," responded Loraine, resolutely.

The long cloak, which had hitherto quite concealed the silent figure lying there, was suddenly tossed back by the driving wind.

"Merciful heaven!" cried Loraine, as she gazed in startled awe upon the white, marble face; "she is no child; she is——"

"Hush!" commanded the doctor, who hastily replaced the cloak about the quiet form, and bore her tenderly within. "Shall she not be sent to the hospital, Mrs. Ulvesford?" he asked, anxiously.

"No," answered Loraine, simply; "I could not have the heart to turn the poor creature from the sheltering walls of Ulvesford Mansion."

How little she knew who it was whom she harbored; she knew not that she, who had been borne into that home so helplessly, should by rights have reigned there, its mistress, the loved and honored wife of its master.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE GRAY DAWN.

THE mirth and revelry, which had been momentarily suspended, flowed on again with redoubled zest, little heeding the strange occurrence which was taking place in another part of the building.

The doctor had been quickly and secretly summoned.

"I am sorry for making a pleasure visit one of business," said Mrs. Lorrimer, apologetically; "but there may be occasion for your services before morning, doctor."

"I shall be only too pleased to render what assistance lies in my power."

"If anything out of the usual order transpires, you will please inform me at once," said Mrs. Lorrimer.

"Certainly."

It was a strange, unatural sight; Doctor Stafford in full ball-room costume, sprays of white heath in the lapel of his coat, watching gravely the flickering shadows that crossed the most beautiful face upon which he had ever gazed.

He felt a strange thrill of interest in the friendless young outcast.

Once the dark eyes opened wide, and a sweet voice whispered:

"Alderic, darling, is that you?"

Doctor Stafford clinched his hands in a tight grip as he brushed a tear from his eye; then patiently resumed his watching.

In the gray early dawn of the Chistmas morning, the doctor hurriedly called for Mrs. Lorrimer.

"You wished to be notified if anything unusual occurred;" there was a kindly smile on his careworn face as he continued: "I am happy to inform you of the presence of a handsome male child."

"Oh! Dr. Stafford!"

"It is very true, madam," he replied, leading the way to the apartment he had lately quitted.

"See," whispered Mrs. Lorrimer, pointing to the white hand of the young mother as it lay beside the infant; "she wears a marriage-ring. Poor thing, where is her husband, I wonder?"

"That is not an easy question to answer, madam."

Suddenly the dark eyes opened wide, fixing themselves upon the elegantly-attired lady and gentleman bending over her.

"Where am I?" asked Izetta, in a weak voice.

The doctor took up a little bundle which lay beside her;

the wee, piping voice of a little babe fell upon her ear; those two standing at that bedside never forgot the glorious light that broke over the young mother's face when she heard the voice of her little babe.

Tears sprang to Mrs. Lorrimer's eyes, cold, proud woman though she was, and the doctor, quite used to such sights, turned away his head.

"You are not to talk, my dear," commanded the doctor, placing the little bundle in her arms. "You are to lie still, and keep very quiet."

As the sun rose on that well-remembered Christmas morning, and the chiming church bells kept time to the merry sleigh bells' jingle and the merry laugh of sportive children, a great sense of security and peace fell over Izetta as she closed her eyes in a dreamless sleep.

Loraine was almost incredulous when she heard the news.

Ulmont had been quite indignant when he heard of the affair.

Loraine, who was sitting beside him when the intelligence was brought her, looked up into her husband's face, reading intuitively his thoughts.

"Of what are you thinking, Ulmont?" she asked, timidly.

He gazed thoughtfully over the distant hills as he answered:

"Loraine, this is the first stranger ever born beneath the roof of the Ulvesfords. Every member of the family was born here," he repeated, "and here they returned to die. It is strange, the first break has been made in our time, Loraine. I had rather it had been otherwise."

"I am sure I did not know, Ulmont, I never thought."

"It was all due to your kindness of heart, Loraine; there is no help for it now. The bells of Ulvesford Mansion should not ring; it is not an heir of the Ulvesford's, whose birth should be joyously celebrated."

"You are not angry with me, Ulmont?"

"Certainly not, dear," and he passed on to his library.

A few moments later Loraine followed him, the most curiously beautiful smile playing about her mouth.

"I have something here to show you," she said, blushing rosily.

"Ulmont leaned back in his chair, and pushed the pile of letters before him into a drawer.

"Now I am all attention, what is it?"

For answer she placed a little, wee, soft bundle she carried, directly in his arms; the next instant an infant's piping wail fell upon his ear.

Two great, dark eyes were staring wonderingly up into

his own, and a little waxen hand curled confidingly around his forefinger.

For an instant every drop of blood left Ulmont Ulvesford's handsome face.

What was there about that tiny creature that held him spellbound, causing his heart to thrill as it had never thrilled before.

The magic touch of the little waxen hand unmanned him.

The little head rested against his breast with a soft, low coo.

The great, dark, searching eyes never left his face.

Ah! who could tell what that tiny, nursing cherub had discovered.

Loraine's face grew white as death as she watched the infant lying so contentedly upon her husband's breast.

She was beginning to feel heartily sorry she had brought it to him.

"Ah, Loraine," he sighed, "I would give half my fortune, and think it well spent, if this little one was the heir of Ulvesford Manor!"

The white lines of pain grew deeper about Loraine's face, as with a forced laugh, she replied, quite carelessly:

"You will make me forget my errand, Ulmont!"

"It must have been a very important one if it could be so easily forgotten."

"Is it not important the baby should have a name? that was my errand here. The young mother held out her hands to me and said, 'call him what you will,' I thought perhaps you could help me, dear."

"I—how?"

"By suggesting something you think appropriate."

"There's plenty of time to think of that."

"I have already thought of a name for him," declared Loraine, timidly. "Somehow I thought—I did not know whether you would approve of it."

"What is the name you thought of?" he asked, curiously.

Was it the cruel irony of fate that caused Ulmont Ulvesford's guileless young wife to lay her hand trustingly upon her husband's arm as she answered, with a smile on her lips.

"Because this little stranger was born at Ulvesford Mansion, I wish him called Ulmont."

A silence, deep as death, fell between them."

The dark eyes of the infant pleadingly searched Ulmont Ulvesford's face.

His beautiful young wife knelt at his feet, the firelight playing on her golden hair.

Baby cooed softly, lying against his breast.

The very chiming of the Christmas bells seemed echoing the strain.

"Call him Ulmont!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHICH side would the scales fall.

One day, two weeks later, Loraine and Izetta sat in the drawing-room in deep conversation.

"Yours is indeed a strange story, Mrs. Ross; still, after hearing it, I again repeat my former offer. You say you are searching for a situation, why not accept mine?"

"It is very different now, Mrs. Ulvesford, since I have baby. I cannot expect to procure the same kind of a situation as before."

"That will not make any difference with me, Mrs. Ross."

"You are very, very kind," murmured Izetta, impulsively kneeling at Loraine's feet, her eyes filled with tears. "You have been so good to me," she sobbed, "I would give my very life for yours, if I could ever repay you."

Loraine smiled down into the dark, beautiful face, little dreaming of the heroic will lying dormant in the girl's breast, or of the terrible ordeal which would try her beyond all power of human endurance.

It was a question evenly balanced, only heaven could tell on which side the scales would fall.

"How strange it is,' 'said Loraine, "that such deep shadows have fallen over your life while mine has been all sunshine. I can understand, poor child, how well you have loved your husband, but I cannot see how your love would live through such bitter neglect. Truly the ways of women are wonderful."

"You would not have wondered had you seen him," answered Izetta; "he was all that was good and noble. It is so hard to believe those lips I thought so true, could have uttered falsehoods while they smiled."

"Still you say," pondered Loraine, "he never once told you he loved you?"

"No, he never spoke of love; he may not have cared for me at first, but, oh, Mrs. Ulvesford, I truly believe he was learning to love me before that cruel letter came to separate us."

A doubtful expression crossed Loraine's face; she knew very little of the world, yet, she felt that no husband, who truly loved, could desert his wife in that dastardly fashion.

"What makes you think that?" she asked.

"His last farewell," responded Izetta. "It was not the parting of an indifferent husband, madam. 'My darling,' he said, 'something has happened which will necessarily part us for a few days, but it will be for only a few days at most, then I shall return for my wife.' He placed all the money he had about him in my hands, together with the address of the nurse. He never knew I was left destitute, he was not so hard as that."

"But the address," questioned Loraine, "even had you not lost it, it was useless; no one in Silvernook knew of him, you say."

"That was the only part of it I could not understand, madam. I advertised for months in the city papers for Alderic, or anyone who knew his whereabouts; it was all useless. Since that fatal morning I have never looked upon his face."

Loraine could not imagine the depths of such cruelty.

"I ought to be very happy, Mrs. Ross; I have never known one wish unfulfilled. I never had a serious thought in life until I met my husband; then I said to myself, unless I gain the love of this man, life will hold no pleasure for me; he was more to me than all the world, and when I married him my happiness was complete. I would as soon think of living without the sunshine, as without my husband's love," and the proud, petted beauty trembled as she spoke.

Izetta sighed, as she replied:

"My husband's love was wholly apart from my life; I had no share in it; now I shall live only for my boy alone. I loved Alderic so fondly, such a love as mine ends only in death."

There was such pathos in her voice that Loraine felt vaguely uneasy; she did not like somber thoughts.

She was so irresistibly drawn toward Izetta, that she determined not to part with her.

"You have not seen my husband, Mrs. Ross; he was called suddenly away the morning after Christmas. I expect him home some time to-day."

"I shall tell him the sad story of this poor creature, then when he sees her, he will think more kindly of her," she thought.

Loraine did not quite like the idea of having the child there, and as soon as practicable she believed Izetta could be induced to part with it; she believed, too, that having it taken charge of elsewhere would be best for the child.

She had yet to learn the power of mother-love; she was sorry she had named this stranger's child after her husband.

Loraine was wondering how she should find words to tell

her she must part from her child, as Izetta thanked her so gratefully for her goodness. Poor Izetta, how could she think that this fair, proud woman envied her the possession of her little child.

Deep down in Izetta's heart she had a hope that some day she would be united to Alderic through his child, her faith was so steadfast.

"We must wait very patiently, you and I, baby," she said, "some day we shall meet Alderic," her heart gave such a great throb of joy at the thought, it almost took her breath away.

Loraine had decided to say nothing of the plans she had concluded for baby's future until she conferred with Ulmont.

Quite as Loraine had expected, he was amazed; he heard his haughty wife, whom few could please, had decided to keep the benighted wanderer, who had fled there for shelter beneath their roof.

A feeling of pity for the deserted young wife, whom he determined not to like, stole over him, as his golden-haired Loraine repeated her sad story.

"It seems almost incredible," he said, "that such wrongs can go unpunished. I will see this young person to morrow; then I can better judge whetner she is more sinned against than sinning; whether or no she is a fit companion for you, my wife.

He was determined she should not be urged to remain, until after he had seen her.

There was but one incentive which led him to think favorably of the affair, which was a keen desire to keep the child near him.

He meant to never lose sight of the child born at Ulvesford Mansion; if he never had an heir of his own, perhaps—who could tell what he would do for the little fellow in the future!

He told himself he would think as well of the mother as he could—for the child's sake.

The next morning Izetta was summoned to the library. Loraine had sent word that her husband wished to speak with her.

Izetta was holding baby when the maid delivered her message.

"Mr. Ulvesford wishes to see me?" she asked, in dismay.

"He says you are to come at the earliest moment, please; he's a walking up and down the room, and not in a pleasant mood, either. He's a nice gentleman, but he does get most awfui cross when he has those thinking spells, as we call 'em. Why, them times you could go straight past him a dozen times a minute and he would look straight

over your head without seeing you. I've seen him even turn his head away from his wife, and say: 'Don't trouble me now, Loraine; go away, I'm thinking.' He's always been thinking, no one but himself knows what about. If we have anything particular to say to Mr. Ulvesford, we always wait till he's through with his spell o' thinking."

"Ah, baby," whispered Izetta, when alone, "perhaps Mr. Ulvesford regrets his wife has offered you and me a shelter."

Unconsciously her hand closed over the same little waxen fingers that had curled so confidingly in Ulmont's clasp; slowly she turned and descended the grand stairway.

"Come in, Mrs. Ross," called Loraine, as she passed her door.

Loraine's *boudoir* was a fitting casket for the jewel it held; the room was a mass of softened bloom and perfume with a great profusion of tall, white lilies, that held up their white cups to the glimmering sunlight.

Izetta never forgot Loraine as she stood there on that winter morning; the memory lingered with her, half pleasure, half pain, all the years of her after life.

She wore a robe of spotless white; as she bent her beautiful head over the lilies, one of her golden curls twined around the lily's stem, and mingled with its golden calyx.

For an instant the blood receded from Izetta's face; this picture which Loraine formed was certainly no new one to her; where had she seen one like it?

Quickly her mind drifted back to that morning on the beach, and to the portrait her husband had shown her; his work, he had said.

"How strange it is," she thought, "I should see just such a picture in real life as crossed his brain in fancy."

She remembered the dull pain in her heart when Alderic had carelessly admitted he liked fair women best.

Loraine never knew why a sudden faintness seized Mrs. Ross; she would have fallen to the floor had she not steadied herself against the marble mantel.

"You are nervous and agitated, Mrs. Ross," said Loraine; "I trust it is not due to this interview with Mr. Ulvesford; he has heard your story and feels very kindly disposed toward you."

A hesitating rap at the door interrupted her.

"Well, Annette, what is it?" asked Loraine.

"If you please, ma'am," answered the maid; "the artist has finished Mr. Ulvesford's portrait and sent it home; do you wish it brought up to you."

"By all means," answered Loraine; "let it be brought up here at once."

"Now, Mrs. Ross," she said, "you shall see my husband's portrait and judge for yourself; he is just the reverse of one to inspire fear, even in the heart of the most timid. I have told him so much of you, he has a desire to have his curiosity gratified."

There was a slight shuffling of feet without, and the next moment a servant entered bearing the portrait of Ulmont Ulvesford.

"Ah! it is true to the very life," exclaimed Loraine, delightedly.

Then she turned to Izetta, proudly as a young queen might have done, as she said:

"Look, Mrs. Ross, this is my husband!"

CHAPTER XXV.

FACE TO FACE.

THE bright sunshine fell full upon the pictured face.

"Look, Mrs. Ross!" Loraine repeated, proudly; "this is my husband."

Izetta stepped forward; for a single instant only her dark eyes rested on the picture; then, with a low, piercing cry, she sank down beside it in a dead swoon.

"I wonder what could have startled her so?" pondered Loraine.

The white lips opened with a faint moan:

"Alderic—Alderic!"

"Poor child!" thought Loraine, "she must have been comparing her own cruel lot with mine."

Slowly the dark eyes opened.

"I—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Ulvesford," she said, while in her heart rose one great cry; "so like, ah! so like!"

"If my husband's portrait had represented a stern, forbidding face, I should say it was that which caused you to faint."

Izetta shuddered.

"May I look at the portrait again?" she asked.

Loraine was only too pleased.

"Yes," she answered, leading the way to an inner apartment; "I have had it hung where the best light will be thrown upon it."

As she spoke, she parted the amber satin curtains, and Izetta was face to face with the portrait of Ulmont Ulvesford.

She did not cry out or utter a moan, her brain whirled and her breath seemed to come and go in short. convulsive gasps. At the first glance the fatal resemblance to

Alderic had almost overpowered her. As she looked again she saw the portrait of a fair-haired young man, while Alderic's was a dark, glossy brown. She remembered Alderic's mouth, proud and haughty; this one was almost wholly concealed by the long, drooping mustache. The proud, uplifted head, and the dark-blue, searching eyes alone reminded her forcibly of Alderic.

"It is simply a coincidence," she told herself, "nothing more."

She had not thought it possible for anyone in the wide, wide world to look like Alderic. She was startled at the tumultuous throbbing of her own heart. The sudden warbling of a yellow canary, hanging in a gilded cage above her head aroused her from her deep reverie.

"I am pleased that you like my husband, Mrs. Ross."

It suddenly occurred to Izetta that Mrs. Ulvesford might not be pleased with the intense scrutiny and rapt gaze she had bestowed on the portrait, but she could not turn away; the dark-blue eyes held an unaccountable fascination for her, the same questioning expression in their depths she had often read in Alderic's; then the heavy, silken folds of the curtain fell between Izetta and the portrait, and she felt as if the darkness of night had slowly settled around her.

The words of Loraine still sounded in her ear. She could not tell why the bitterness of death seemed to fall upon her, as she gazed upon that pictured face and heard the words:

"Look, Mrs. Ross, this is my husband!"

"Mr. Ulvesford awaits Mrs. Ross in the library," said the maid, again making her appearance.

"Tell him she is with me, in the morning-room, I will send her down directly. There need be no hurry," she said, turning to Izetta; "I want you to regain some of your lost color before you go down. Anyone would imagine you had seen a ghost."

Ah! she little knew the young girl had stood that morning amid the shattered ruins of her dead hopes, face to face with her past.

Izetta walked with a firm step toward the library.

"Why should I shrink and cower?" she asked herself. "I have done no wrong—I must be brave for baby's sake!"

The door was standing ajar, she knocked timidly, once, twice, but there was no response; at the third and little louder rap, Zack, th coachman, answered the summons.

"If you please, you are to take a seat, master was called away for a moment, he will return in a very few moments," he said.

Then Zack withdrew from the room and Izetta was left to the contemplation of her own thoughts.

A note-book, a glove, and a riding-whip lay on the desk before her. A huge mastiff lay on the hearth-rug watching her from under his shaggy eyebrows. The sound of her own name falling upon her ears from the adjacent room chained her attention.

"Are you not afraid your daughter will rue it, Mrs. Lorrimer, allowing this stranger to remain beneath her roof?" said a strange voice.

"I have been seriously expostulating with Loraine on this very point; I assure you I have felt a great depression ever since that woman, with the beautiful, foreign face, entered this house; then there is the child. I am urging strongly that he shall be——" at the mention of the child Izetta strove to hear what they were saying, but the voice had sunk to a low, inaudible whisper.

"I heartily agree with you," responded the stranger, "only yesterday I told your daughter: 'Take care, my dear Mrs. Ulvesford, this child does not prove a thorn in your path of roses!' Is the child pretty?"

"Decidedly so," answered Mrs. Lorrimer; "yet there is something about that child that puzzles me. I have told Loraine so, but she only laughs, and replies: 'How fanciful you are, mother.' Still, I repeat it, I do not like the child."

"What does Mr. Ulvesford think of the plan you propose?"

"He has not heard of it yet, he will certainly object. I assure you he is quite interested in that child."

"That is a very startling idea," exclaimed the visitor; "it reminds me of the serious trouble a friend of mine once experienced. Her husband and she, although dearly loving children, were childless, that boon was denied them. She took a neighbor's child into her home. Husband and wife never seemed the same to each other after that; imperceptible at first, the husband turned from his wife to that child. When at last an heir of their own was born, it was too late; no power on earth could alienate the husband's affections which were lavished upon the stranger. The young wife lived to see her own child turned from its own father's door, its place usurped by a stranger's child."

"Your story quite frightens me," replied Mrs. Lorrimer; "if I anticipated such a *denouement* in this case, do you know what I should be tempted to do?"

In vain Izetta strove to catch the next few words.

"Heaven help me!" she cried, rocking herself to and fro, 'surely they do not wish to separate baby and me!"

She could hear the distant rumbling of the storms which

were gathering over her future. One thought only forced itself upon her—they did not want her little child.

"No!" she cried, starting with new energy to her feet; "my darling, you are all I have in this wide, wide world. No one shall take you from me. If they turn us from their door we shall still have each other; and if we find the world too cold, baby, you and I can die together."

She remembered how the dark waters looked tipped by the silvery light of the stars; those waters which gently laved the coral bed which entombed her grandfather; still, she tried hard to put these dark thoughts away—for baby's sake.

Then she quite laughed aloud; she had certainly misunderstood them. How could anyone mean to separate her from her little child?

She remembered they had said Mr. Ulvesford was pleased with baby; they said of him, too, that he was kind of heart.

She would tell him a home beneath that roof would be Heaven to her; but she would kneel at his feet, and tell him she must keep her little son with her. Better homeless, penniless, out in the perils of the storm again, than parted from her little child.

Suddenly the sound of a clear, ringing step was heard on the stair; the shadow of a tall, dark form fell between Izetta and the sunlight, a strong, white hand pushed back the partially opened door, and a pair of dark-blue eyes flashed pleasantly about the room, observing at once the slight figure by the fireside, and a voice, whose cadence fell upon her ear like the memory of some forgotten dream, said courteously:

"Mrs. Ross, I believe?"

A deep silence fell between them.

At last Ulmont Ulvesford and Izetta had met—face to face!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PLOT DEEPENS.

In the library at Hampton Place quite another scene was being enacted.

It was early morning, yet the lights remained as they had been lit the previous evening. The fire was burning low and fitfully in the grate. There was a haggard expression on the face of Heath Hampton in the flickering firelight. He strode up and down the room in deep thought.

No word had broken the deep silence for an hour or more.

He clinched the letters he held in his hand, as if they

were sensible of the pain he would inflict upon the writers if he could.

"Read these letters again, Vatal," he commanded; "I say there must be some loop-hole."

Slowly the dwarf picked up the letters that had been tossed into his lap, smoothing them out carefully with his hand. The first was marked "Official," post-marked "Switzerland," and read as follows:

"MY DEAR HAMPTON:—As per agreement, I ascertained, upon close investigation, owing to the extraordinary complications which surround this uncommon case, that a warrant for the extradition papers, for the removal of Ulmont Ulvesford back to Switzerland on the charge of murder in the first degree, could be obtained if the facts in the case were clearly proven, as stated.

"True, the surgeon who officiated is dead; and the opposite parties left the ground before the extent of the injury had been declared.

"My testimony was corroborated by the finding of some poor fellow's mangled remains over the cliff, utterly unrecognizable.

"Everyone at the inn admits the knowledge of a disturbance. Upon the stand, Wylmer Lee admitted that the duel had taken place on the very edge of the precipice, though he insisted that death had not taken place at the time he departed in company with Ulvesford.

"Of course, old fellow, I say now, as I said then, you were foolish in returning to America. You should have remained abroad.

"I am lost in wonder when I imagine you back in a locality where you are so well known; if you were once recognized, all our work here would be in vain.

"The officers in charge of the necessary papers sailed on the steamer *White Cresson*. I hope to hear in your reply of the successful issue of our enterprise.

"Yours very truly,

"DE RISNAR."

With a grating, sardonic laugh, Hampton took the letters from Vatal's hand, thrusting them into the breast pocket of his coat.

"Money," he said, "I never knew a day's peace in my life; someone is always hounding me down for money. I staked my all on winning the heiress of Lorrimer Hall; even my mother's companion, like a frightened bird, took wings and flew away while under my very grasp."

Vatal was just on the point of telling the great secret he had but yesterday unearthed.

As he was driving slowly past Ulvesford Manor, he had

seen a white, terrified face that had instantly vanished from the window, as her gaze met that of the dwarf.

"No," he told himself, "the secret will keep; it will be worth money to me in the future; it was not worth while to divulge it just now; Hampton has no money to pay for it."

"What are you mumbling about; why don't you speak out, man?" cried Hampton, angrily, stopping short in his walk.

"Because there's no cause for my saying anything," growled the dwarf, snapping his white teeth viciously together, his small, ferret-like eyes flashing fire.

For a moment Heath Hampton regarded the creature before him with a keen, critical, searching gaze.

"There's no use in our quarreling over trifles, Vatal," he said, with a forced, grating laugh; "honest men get their just dues, when rogues fall out."

He did not notice the dull gleam in the dwarf's eye, as he turned impatiently on his heel, resuming his quick tread up and down the room.

"All would have gone well with me if I had captured the heiress," he muttered, excitedly, "all this would never have happened, but for that cursed Ulvesford!"

He clinched his nails deep into the palms of his hand, as the imprecation burst from his lips. The loss of the golden prize had been a bitter blow to him.

"It is evident that I must have money," he muttered, "no matter where I get it, or how."

His brow darkened vindictively.

"What's the time, Vatal?"

There was no response, and, turning round, he found the dwarf had silently left the room.

"Curse that fool!" he muttered, "he must be watched like a sleuth-hound. If he was only out of the way I could breathe freer. He knows too much—altogether too much; we have worked in the harness together too long; he must be effectually swept from my path!"

A deep, diabolical plot was revolving in Heath Hampton's brain, a fatal plot which led to the sorriest of crimes.

"I have not lost all my cunning yet," he said to himself. "Ha! did not Robert Bruce, of Scotland, fail a score of times ere he reached his grand success?"

Hampton did not stop to reason that that cause had been an honest one. He smiled as he thought of the daring bravery of King Richard III.

"What are my few petty deeds," he cried, "to the many daring deeds of Richard before he gained the crown? Vatal has been a willing tool, but his days of usefulness

are over; his knowledge would make him a dangerous foe."

Suddenly attracted by a slight rustle in the room, he raised his eyes.

"Mother," he said, harshly, fixing his keen, penetrating eyes sharply upon her, as if he would read her very thoughts, "tell me how long you have been here."

"I have just entered," she replied. "What is the meaning, Heath, of the brightly burning gas-light in the broad glare of day. Surely you have not been up all night, have you, my son?"

She laid her hand wistfully on her son's arm. He shook off her light touch impatiently.

"Don't annoy me with your importunings," he said, ungraciously.

"There was a time, Heath," she said, "when you would listen to your mother's counsel; depend upon it, without it, you will rush headlong to your ruin."

He answered her with a bitter, taunting laugh.

"You might as well talk of the horrors of hanging to the poor wretch who stands at the gallows with the rope about his neck, Bah! I am as near ruined now as I can be."

"It is all your own fault, Heath, you should have——"

"Never throw up the past, mother, what good can that do?"

"The rocks of the past warn us of the future."

"It's rather late in the day to commence moralizing now, mother; you should have practiced what you preach years ago. I'm in a series of scrapes; there's only one way you can help me out."

For a moment this mother and son stood facing each other.

"If it is the want of money again, Heath," she said with the slow, cold tones peculiar to her, "we will not discuss the subject; let it drop. I have humored your whims and spent a fortune upon you. Your waywardness has been the cause of my deepest grief. I have raised you like a gentleman, while the other——"

Heath Hampton raised his hand warningly.

"Have a care, mother," he cried, "walls have ears; trust a woman for never yet keeping a secret."

His face was pale, and livid lines were drawn about his mouth.

"See how you have repaid me," cried his mother, in bitter anger, forgetting her caution, "a gambler and a *roue*."

"It's a wonder you do not add murderer and thief in the

true bill," he said, sneeringly, taking a cigar from his pocket and calmly lighting it.

"The road you are on leads to it," she retorted.

How little she knew he stood upon the brink of it.

"You could help me, mother, if you would," he answered; "and I would leave the country."

"Never again." she replied, sternly. "You have had it in your power to do well; you have always let your chances slip. See the terrible sacrifice I made for your sake. If I ever repented——"

Heath Hampton leaped to his feet, crying hoarsely:

"You dare not repent after all these long years; think how the world would rise at such heartlessness and cruelty. You think I, your son, could be faultless. Ask the raven why he is not a canary, and he will tell you: 'By right of ancestry!'"

She held up her hands with a low cry.

"Is it for this," she groaned, "after all these long years—you, for whom I have toiled and schemed, taunt me with my crime. I reared you a gentleman; see how little it avails you. You might have retrieved your fortune with the Lorrimer money, but you let it slip, and wasted your time abroad; then, worst of all, you came home to me a cripple," she cried, pointing to the scarred hand, so hideously seamed. "I believe it is vengeance. One cripple in the house was enough. And you mysteriously creep home under cover of the night, shunning the gaze of men like a felon. What does all this mean? Answer me, Heath Hampton. I have the right—I demand to know this mystery you would keep from me, here and now!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ROBBERY PLANNED.

"I MAY have reasons for my actions, which I do not choose to disclose," responded Hampton. "You will be wise not to interfere in my affairs. Money is the only thing that will help me; advice is a cheap commodity."

"You shall never have another cent until I die," she retorted, sternly, her white, thin, jeweled hands clasped nervously together. "I have borne patiently with you for years, and you would beggar me in my old age, if permitted."

Although the mother knew but too well his many follies, she loved this handsome, daring, reckless son as she had never loved anything in her solitary life. What had she not undergone for his sake?

"Listen, mother," he cried; "I appeal to you for the last

time; advance me a thousand dollars, and I will never ask you for another cent!"

The rare diamonds on her breast gleamed strangely in the pallid morning light.

Her face was rigid as the marble Flora against which she leaned.

"No," she said, "not another cent—mark me, not one cent."

"So be it," he answered, gloomily; "but I want you to always remember, whatever happens, I was not thoroughly wicked; there was a time, and not long ago, when I might have been redeemed by love."

"I am certainly at a loss to understand you. What do you mean?"

"I am dealing in plain facts; first, I followed your instructions by offering myself to the haughty heiress of Lorrimer Hall, only to be refused for my pains. I had never met any woman then whom I thought I could love for herself."

Mrs. Hampton's cold, glittering eyes never once left her son's white face as he continued:

"I cursed the fate that swept that grand estate from my grasp; wealth was my idol: suddenly my heart awoke to the subtle influence of a woman's face—do not start, mother, it is true—yet you kept us asunder, yes, you; had you permitted me to woo and win your late companion for my wife, I might have been a different man to-day. I loved her passionately, madly, yet you kept us asunder, poisoned her against me; now, she has fled from me, and with her all hopes of my ever leading a better life."

He finished his sentence with a hard, bitter, mocking laugh, that grated harshly on his listener's ear.

"Ah, this is the reason, then, Miss Rienzi fled from us so unceremoniously," she said, slowly.

She had been so vigilant lest Izetta should meet her son, yet they had met; she wondered where and when.

With a quick motion she advanced to where her son sat, placing her hand on his dark hair as she said:

"Heath, my boy, I would rather see you dead than wedded to a beautiful pauper. In me you see a shattered life, still I know the advantages of money; while you throw yourself headlong at the shrine of a pretty face; from this time on I have done with you. It's but Dead Sea fruit, after all," she said, slowly, a spasm of pain crossing her dark face.

Turning hastily, she left the room, her heavy, black silk robes trailing after her on the thick carpet.

She little realized under what circumstances she would again look upon the desperate, reckless face of her son.

Late that afternoon she sent for Vatal. It had been years since the dwarf had received such a summons.

"What can she want of me?" he muttered, as he made his appearance at her door.

"Come in, Vatal," she said.

Her voice had a weary sound in it.

Although it was scarcely dusk, the curtains were closely drawn, and the red firelight, which leaped and spluttered in the burnished grate, threw grotesque shadows against the walls and on the jewels that quivered on Mrs. Hampton's breast, as she sat in her low rocker by the hearth.

The dwarf noticed that she sat with her face partially turned from him. She was not a woman to waste time in unnecessary words.

"Sit down, Vatal."

On this occasion she came to the subject uppermost in her mind at once.

"Can you tell me, Vatal, where and when my son first met Miss Rienzi, the young girl who so mysteriously disappeared from here lately?"

"On the day she first came here, madam."

"You are in the habit of driving my son about considerably, are you not?"

"I was, madam, before he went abroad; very little since his return."

"Try to remember if he ever met Miss Rienzi before she came here."

"Not to my knowledge; they appeared to meet that day as perfect strangers."

"Do you know if they have met since.

"No, madam; I am sure they have not."

"Why are you so positive, Vatal?"

For a moment the dwarf was silent.

"I command you to answer me, Vatal," she said, fastening her flashing eyes upon him, those eyes which had such a strange influence over him.

"I am sure he has not met Miss Rienzi since, for he has moved Heaven and earth almost to find her."

For a moment Mrs. Hampton scarcely breathed in her intense excitement.

"You are perfectly sure he has not succeeded, Vatal?"

"Perfectly sure, madam; she flitted in all that terrible storm; we traced her footprints some distance only to lose them effectually in the drifts beyond."

"There is still another question I would ask, Vatal. Who are these strangers who persistently haunt this house?"

"They wish to see Mr. Hampton."

"What do they want?"

"They are creditors, madam, pressing for money."

"Poor Heath," she said, quite under her breath, "I did not dream it was so bad as that."

"They believe Mr. Hampton is still abroad, and come to ask when he will return."

"Yes, yes," she answered, abstractedly; "you may go now, Vatal. Stay," she called, as he was about to quit the room. "You are quite contented, are you not, Vatal?"

Her face was turned away, but there was a thrill of wistfulness in her voice.

The dwarf was amazed; this cold woman, who had not deigned even so much as a glance at him for years, to ask him if he—the miserable, despised dwarf—the tool of her capricious son, was contented. He wondered if he had heard aright.

The deep silence annoyed her.

"You are contented with your lot in life, are you not, Vatal? Never having had wealth, education, or luxury, you do not realize the loss of them. You are satisfied, are you not?"

"What good would it do me if I were not?" he answered. "I was accursed from the hour of my birth, and abandoned——"

"For God's sake spare me," she cried; then almost instantly recovering herself.

The dwarf gazed at her with a frightened expression. He thought he had annoyed her by saying too much.

"Go, now, Vatal."

Instantly he obeyed.

One thought troubled him. If she mentioned this interview to her son, he dared not think of the consequences; he would go back and beg her not to mention it; and turning noiselessly he retraced his steps and entered.

He was about to speak, when suddenly the sound of his name on her lips chained his attention.

"Poor Vatal," she said, with a hard, dry sob. "His infirmity should have caused pity, not hatred; *all* should have been his!"

She rocked herself to and fro.

"'Twas all for Heath's sake," she muttered.

Vatal could not explain the impulse which caused him to secrete himself behind the heavy, hanging curtains where he could see and hear unobserved.

"Fool that I am, 'tis too late now to give vent to sorrow thus," she cried, touching a taper to the fire, and securely fastening the door.

"Heath shall have money, just this once," she muttered; and drawing from her bosom a peculiar long, thin key,

she parted the hanging curtains of an alcove, disclosing a heavy, iron chest, which she hastily unlocked.

The iron door creaked noisily back on its rusty hinges. From the safe she took two dark, mahogany boxes, which she placed on the table, drawing up her rocker close beside them, and proceeded to examine their contents.

One was filled with papers—most of them dingy with age, at sight of which for a moment she lay back so white and still in her chair, Vatal thought she must have fainted.

She aroused herself, crushing the papers hastily back into the box; she did not notice a small, well-worn package that slipped from her grasp, rolling noiselessly to Vatal's very feet.

Had she turned her head ever so slightly, she must have observed it, if she put forth her hand to recover it, detection must have surely followed.

The dwarf knew this, and in an instant he stooped down and possessed himself of the package, which he hastily thrust into his pocket.

The contents of the other box absorbed Mrs. Hampton's attention.

The dwarf fairly held his breath as the glimmering light fell upon its contents, heaped to the brim with bright, shining gold.

The very sight made the fire leap through Vatal's veins.

She carefully counted out one thousand dollars in coins, piling them upon the table, replaced the boxes in the safe and the key about her neck; tied the coins in her kerchief, and after placing them securely under her pillow, tossed herself upon her couch to rest.

The eyelids slowly closed over the tired eyes, and her regular breathing showed Vatal that she slept.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CRUEL SON.

A WILD desire had seized the dwarf, at the sight of the gold, to possess it.

What could he not do if it were only his!

Vatal had never been totally depraved at heart.

There had been moments when many a generous impulse to do a good deed had stirred in the dwarf's heart; but the world had shunned and derided him, and the good impulses were wholly crushed out by cruel insults.

The great temptation was more than he could withstand.

To possess himself of the gold beneath the pillow was but the work of an instant; but the key to the chest, how could he obtain that, the key which held the treasure?

"I must have the gold in yonder chest, let the consequences be what they may," he muttered.

As he stooped over the prostrate form, the door swung softly back on its hinges.

Vatal had hardly time to draw back into the shadow of the curtains ere Heath Hampton, with white face and gleaming eyes, softly and stealthily as a panther, glided into the room.

He carried a shaded night-lamp in his hand, which he placed noiselessly on the table.

For an instant only he hesitated.

"By fair means or foul," he muttered, setting his lips firmly together, "I must have money."

He groped his way carefully about the room until his hand came in contact with the iron safe; again the curtains were looped back, and the midnight intruder proceeded to carefully examine the lock.

He drew a bunch of skeleton-keys from his pocket, inserting them one by one in the rusty lock.

"The money will not be missed for a day or two," he muttered.

He drew the last key from the lock; the desperate frown on his face deepened—useless!

Then commenced a thorough search through the room, bureaus were rifled and boxes overturned without success.

Mrs. Hampton moved uneasily in her slumbers at that moment; the cord about her neck attracted his attention. Without an instant's deliberation, he severed it in twain and held the coveted key at last in his hand.

Again the door of the safe swung back on its rusty hinges with a loud creak.

Heath Hampton stooped, listening intently.

The sleeper stirred uneasily, and the dwarf from his hiding-place distinctly heard her murmur:

"No one must know the contents of the safe, for Heath's sake; the secret must die with me!"

Carefully the son abstracted the two boxes, quickly and noiselessly forcing open the lids.

"Ah! the papers," he muttered, "they must be secured as well as the gold. Women must not guard so vital a secret; once destroyed they will tell no tales."

He made a hurried examination of the remaining contents of the safe, and evidently satisfied, he hurriedly locked it, replacing the key about the sleeper's neck, and securing the two boxes, he stole softly from the apartment, followed by the revengeful dwarf.

When quite opposite the library, Vatal spoke.

"Is that you, Mr. Hampton?" he asked.

With a bitter oath, which nearly caused him to drop the two boxes he carried, Heath Hampton turned upon him.

"What are you doing up at this hour of the night?" he demanded, sharply.

"I have been waiting to see you all the evening. I have important——"

"You miserable cur!" cried Hampton, with an impotent yell of rage; "you have been watching me, have you, dogging my footsteps, eh? I'll have a short settlement with you here and now."

"You are mistaken," said the dwarf, coolly, his eyes gleaming a dusky fire; "I have news of Miss Rienzi, which I learned to-night, but it takes money to buy it."

For a moment Hampton glared at him as if in doubt what course to pursue.

"Well, in that case it's a little different. What makes you think I can pay for your cursed secret, when you know how I am fixed financially?"

"You might raise the money for that, if it's worth anything to you," answered Vatal, doggedly.

"How much do you want? Five dollars?"

The blood boiled in Vatal's veins as he thought of the box so heavily laden with gold which he knew was secreted under the cloak Hampton wore.

"Not a cent less than one hundred dollars," replied the dwarf, determinedly.

"Well, for once I'll humor you. What do you know about Miss Reinzi's whereabouts?"

Still Vatal hesitated.

"Oh, I see; it's cash in advance, eh? See that the information is worth it, or it will be the worse for you." As he spoke he placed the sum grudgingly in Vatal's hand.

"I have traced her to her hiding-place, not ten miles distant."

"Can it be possible?" cried Hampton, excitedly.

"Yes," replied Vatal; "and the strangest part of the affair—she is at Ulvesford Manor!"

"W-h-a t!" shrieked the irate Hampton, "do you mean to tell me that she, too, is beneath that roof? How do you know?"

"I saw her face at the window twice."

"When?"

"Once last week, and again to day."

"You rascally cur, how does it happen you did not come to me directly with the information then? Why, do you know, I have half a mind to thrash you within an inch of your life?"

The dwarf set his lips tightly together as he replied;

"I was not quite *sure* until to-day that it was she."

"Humph!" ejaculated Hampton, slightly mollified, as he turned on his heel and strode toward his apartment.

An hour later, with a heavy, dark cloak thrown about his shoulders, more to conceal the boxes he carried, than from actual need, Heath Hampton quietly quitted the house.

"I must never lose sight of him and that girl," muttered Vatal, stealthily following his footsteps.

It was evident that Hampton was at a loss as to which road he had better take.

A sudden thought seemed to occur to him; he would go down the river a short distance toward Ulvesford Manor.

A bold scheme occurred to him—why not abduct the girl—he had plenty of money to see himself through?

"I will do it," he cried: "ha! my bird, flap your pretty wings as much as you like, I will hover about like a hawk and swoop down upon you when you least expect."

Several skiffs lay fastened to their moorings; he tossed his burden into one of them, took up the oars and floated silently down with the tide.

A few moments later, a second boat pushed out quietly into the stream, keeping close to the bank, silently following in the wake of the first.

The night was dark and cloudy; the two boats—out alone in the darkness and the night, were within a few feet of each other.

Suddenly Hampton's skiff lay motionless on the wave.

There was a low, gurgling sound, as of a heavy weight dropped down into the silent water, followed by a momentary ripple; then the dark waters, that had had full many a secret, which they never yet divulged, intrusted to their keeping, flowed on.

The dwarf marked the spot well.

Hampton's skiff glided rapidly onward to its fatal mission, followed closely in the rear by the one occupied by Vatal, the dwarf.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LINKS OF FATE.

For an instant the room seemed to whirl around Izetta.

"Alderic, Alderic!" she cried, but the words died away on her lips, making no sound.

He turned his handsome face where the sunshine fell full upon his fair, curling hair.

Ah, God! It was not an imprecation, but a prayer for strength to live through it.

The fair-haired stranger, with a voice so like, was not Alderic.

Yet the great resemblance for an instant had electrified her. She was face to face with the original of the portrait, yet this was not Alderic.

For an instant Ulmont Ulvesford gazed down into those dark, terrified eyes, with a puzzled, thoughtful expression.

He could not remember that they had ever met before; yet just such a pair of dark, soulful eyes as these seemed ever haunting him.

In crowded halls, in sunlight and in gloaming, in the silent hour of midnight, he had seen just such passionful, pleading eyes.

Then he remembered he must not be wanting in courtesy toward this helpless stranger.

He held out his hand to her.

"Mrs. Ross, I believe," he said.

He wondered why the little, cold hand dropped so suddenly from his own, and the blood swept over those pale cheeks and receded again, leaving them whiter than the petals of a white rose.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Mrs. Ross; I was unexpectedly summoned out into the grounds; I trust you will pardon my delay," he said, in his clear, musical voice.

He drew up a chair toward the fire, sitting opposite her.

Izetta thought she must surely die then and there, as she watched that handsome face over which the firelight flickered; every gesture reminded her so forcibly of Alderic, her faithless husband.

She wondered if the mouth, quite concealed by the drooping mustache, was firm and haughty like Alderic's. Had this stranger had dark, waving hair like him, Izetta would have fled; the sight would have been more than she could bear.

The very touch of his hand, and the sound of his voice thrilled her through and through.

"Oh, cruel, relentless fate," she cried, "why have you brought me face to face with one so like Alderic, whom I thought like none other!"

How could she remain beneath the same roof with this man, breathe the same air, listen to his voice—and live? The very torture would drive her to madness.

By a great effort Izetta collected her scattered thoughts to listen to what he was saying.

"My wife has told me your sad history; believe me, you have my deepest sympathy, Mrs. Ross. My wife was warm in your praise, but I see she has not overdrawn in her description. You will pardon me, I trust, for broaching so sore a subject, but I cannot understand how a man could

desert a tender, clinging little creature like yourself; it is so strange, I am lost in amazement. Was your husband of the same nativity as yourself, Mrs. Ross?"

"No, I think not, he came from France, yet I believe him to be an American."

"Ah!" thought Ulmont, "the wretch brought her over the seas to his own land to abandon her. "You have no certificate of your marriage?"

"No, sir; my husband said the rector was to forward one, as soon as he reached home."

"That is very bad—very bad, indeed," reflected Ulmont; "for the sake of the child he should be found, if possible. I will do all I can to assist you; the case must be put in the hands of the most experienced detectives; they are used to such cases. Society is in danger with such a man at large."

"I firmly believe some day we shall meet," exclaimed Izetta; "a solemn voice seems whispering—we shall one day meet; then, before the world, he shall acknowledge me—his wife, and acknowledge his little, innocent child!"

"You have no clew by which you could trace him?"

"None whatever, sir," she answered, sadly. "I shall trust blindly to Heaven to guide me."

Ulmont Ulvesford felt the deepest compassion for this beautiful young creature; there was no taint of worldliness about her.

Five minutes after he heard her speak, he would have staked his life on her virtue and her honor.

"You will find a haven of rest here," he said, "for both yourself and your child. You please Loraine, therefore I am only too pleased to join with her in offering you a home."

Izetta could not speak, so great was her emotion, great tears of gratitude filled her eyes.

"As for the child," he continued, "a suitable nurse can soon be procured for the little fellow."

How sweet and restful it sounded to Izetta to hear this pleasant-voiced young man planning so thoughtfully for her little baby's future.

"Even a stranger," she thought, bitterly, "is more kind to the child than his own father has been, the father who knows not of his very existence."

"I think the little one is the handsomest child, without a doubt, I have ever seen. I should like him to remain here," Ulmont said.

Izetta could have fallen on her knees and blessed him for those words.

"I hope you have decided to remain with us, Mrs. Ross?" he asked, earnestly.

"Oh, most willingly, sir, if I may only be permitted to keep my little child with me."

"There is no doubt about that—why, of course, you will keep the child," he replied. "It is seldom my wife takes as much of a fancy to anyone as she has to you, Mrs. Ross. She is as capricious as the April sunshine, my proud, willful Loraine, but you will find her heart kind and appreciative, her friendship stanch and true. I do not hesitate in believing that you will always maintain the high regard in which she now holds you. I can say no more than that, Mrs. Ross."

"I thank you more than I can find words to express," murmured Izetta. "I shall try to be deserving."

"Then we may consider the matter fully settled, shall we not?"

"If you please, sir," she replied, gratefully.

At that moment Loraine entered the room, gliding gracefully to an ottoman beside her husband's chair, upon which she seated herself.

Ulmont passed his arm lovingly around the slender waist.

"My dear, Mrs. Ross has consented to remain with her charming little one."

"I am very pleased at her decision."

Ulmont did not notice the cloud that settled for a moment over his wife's face, as he mentioned the child.

"I am very sure, Mrs. Ross and I will get along famously together," she replied, with a smile. "She must put away that sorrowful face, though, and look at the bright side of life. I would rather die young," she said, laughingly, than live to know sorrow. Let me live like the bees and birds coquetting with the flowers."

"Not like the bees or the birds, I hope, for they are fickle, coquettish rovers," said Ulmont, with a roguish twinkle in his eyes. I could not endure seeing you coquetting with other——"

Loraine put her white fingers over his lips.

"Other flowers, you were going to say; how do you know that you are not considered a thorn or a thistle, sir?"

"Not quite so bad as that I hope," he answered, quizzically, gazing down into the azure eyes laughing so brightly, sparklingly up into his face.

"Have you never heard how the last coquettish 'Queen Bee's' life is passed in the pretty poem?"

"No," he admitted; "won't you repeat it for me?"

"Yes," responded Loraine, leaning her arm on the back of his chair.

"'Queen bee through many a garden roves,
And hums her lay of courtship o'er;
When she finds the flower she loves,
She settles there, and roams no more.'"

Izetta watched the lover-like husband and wife with a sick, troubled heart.

"Why is not such love mine?" she sighed. "Why was the cup of happiness dashed so rudely from my lips?"

She was so young to realize that love, light, and happiness were lost to her forever.

Every caress Ulmont Ulvesford gave his golden-haired young wife sank into her heart like a sword-thrust; she could not tell why the sight gave her such inexpressible pain.

"I am so glad the subject is settled, and that you are really to stay."

Loraine, gliding gracefully across the room, leaned over Izetta, taking the little, trembling hands in her own white, jeweled ones.

"I want you to feel perfectly at home with us. Mrs. Ross sounds so cold and formal, I would much prefer calling you by your given name. I am sure it must be something very poetical and sweet, matching your foreign face. What may I call you?"

"My name is Izetta," she answered, blushingly.

"Izetta! What a picturesque, musical name. I do not think I have ever heard it before. Has she not a lovely name, Ulmont?" cried his wife, turning toward him.

"I beg your pardon, my dear," he said. "I did not hear your remark. I was thinking."

Loraine's lips curled like a pouting, spoiled child's.

"How terribly provoking," she cried. "Half of what I say is lost upon you. I do not know which claims more of your attention, your wife or your thoughts."

"You might with safely decide in favor of my wife," he replied, gallantly, "for I assure you my thoughts are about her."

The frown cleared like magic from Loraine's face; she blushed rosily.

"I must beg your pardon," she said, "but, really, Ulmont, I have never heard a name quite as pretty as Mrs. Ross's—it is Izetta; does it not sound sweetly foreign?"

The goblet of ice-water which Ulmont held in his hand fell to the floor with a loud crash.

He could scarcely believe it was the sweet, melodious voice of Loraine he had heard, it seemed to have been shrieked out on the air.

The name seemed to pierce his very soul—Izetta—had he never heard that name before?

He looked at the sweet, foreign face before him, passing his hand over his brow with a strange, bewildered sensation stealing over him.

Ulmont Ulvesford made, in that supreme moment, a mighty, heroic effort to follow the tangled thoughts which beset him.

The name, Izetta, struck a strange chord in his soul. He sighed sorrowfully, and his thoughts melted into chaos.

"Why, Ulmont, see what you have done!" cried Loraine. "See, you have spoiled my pretty Undine," she cried, pointing to the hearth-rug, from which the water trickled in little, tiny rills.

It was too true; the red wool had dyed the white hand of the fairy maid, which lay lightly upon her bodice, a deep crimson.

Loraine shuddered; the white hand seemed as if it were clasping a broken, bleeding heart, and the glowing firelight, leaping playfully in the grate, threw strange shadows over it.

"Take the rug away," said Loraine, nervously, covering her face with her hands. "I never want to behold it again!"

Someone had once laughingly suggested that the fair, dainty coloring of this Undine resembled Loraine—would her heart ever break like this fair Undine's?

The servant removed all trace of the accident; still Loraine felt nervous.

"Come," said Loraine, clasping Izetta's hand, "come with me to my *boudoir*."

Ulmont Ulvesford, as one fascinated, watched them leave the room together.

Never did mortal man gaze upon such a strange sight; both of these innocent women, peerless in their startling beauty, cruelly wrecked by the love of one man upon the jagged rock of fate.

How was it to end?

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BABY'S FUTURE.

ULMONT vetoed the idea of sending Izetta's child from Ulvesford Manor, when the subject was broached to him two weeks later.

"I cannot imagine how my tender-hearted Loraine could entertain, for a moment, a thought so cruel as to separate that suffering creature from her child."

A tear stood in Loraine's eyes as she answered proudly:

"I did not think you would—you would—care to see a stranger's child playing about these old corridors."

"Do you mean you would not care to see him here, Loraine?"

She tossed her golden head proudly back; the Lorrimer fire leaped into her calm, blue eyes.

"It does not matter to me, I assure you," she replied, coldly.

She would sooner have cut her right hand off than admit to him that she was actually jealous of a strange little child, bitterly jealous, because she had seen it lying for one brief moment upon his breast, placed there by her own hands.

Ulmont took her at her word.

"I wondered if you really desired that poor helpless little child sent away; it was not like my own generous-hearted Loraine to have such thoughts."

She did not answer him.

"How does it happen I have never seen Mrs. Ross since that morning you sent her to the library?" he asked suddenly.

"I am sure I do not know," she replied.

"I often laugh at the foolish fancy, but I quite believe she avoids me. You should make the shy little creature feel more at home. If I meet her in hall, parlor or library, she flits before me like a shadow. If I speak to her suddenly, she looks as if she were about to faint, she is as timid as a young fawn."

"Well," answered Loraine, breaking into a jolly, little laugh, "if that is the case, the greatest kindness you can do her, is to let her quite alone. It is plainly evident she does not appreciate you, my dear."

He laughed good naturedly, replying:

"So I supposed. And do you know," he continued, "your *protege* is creating quite a *furor* hereabouts. Several of my friends have urged me to present them to the pretty, little, foreign beauty. You must look to your laurels, Loraine, or the crimson rose may outbloom the tall, white, golden-hearted lily.

"As long as there was one who preferred the lily, I should not care who chose the crimson rose, or what the world thought," she said, putting back the fair hair that clustered round his forehead.

Ulmont quickly imprisoned the little, white hand, but she drew it hastily away, remembering he had not granted the request she had asked.

"I shall never like that child," she cried, her fair face flushing angrily, after her husband had quitted the room; "I am sure it will be war between us to the bitter end!"

There was a germ of jealousy away down at the root of Loraine's heart; it was the inheritance of the Lorrimer daughters for generations back. Gentle, loving, tender women, all of them, but their love was their life, their ruin, or their salvation. Loraine was the most willful, proudest, most capricious of them all.

Mrs. Lorrimer had always said she thanked Heaven her child had secured the man she loved; had it been otherwise, she would have trembled at the depths of despair and passion which she knew lay dormant beneath that fair, smiling exterior. Mrs. Lorrimer had been bitterly opposed to Izetta, because of her rare beauty; she watched her every glance and word.

"I wish to Heaven," she often said to herself, "fate had not driven her there."

She often saw Ulmont's eyes resting on Izetta's face with a strange, indefinable expression, and each day he was growing more fond of the child. Loraine might have felt kinder toward the little one, had not her mother spoken so bitterly on the subject.

Although Izetta fled from Ulmont Ulvesford, she loved to gaze upon him unobserved; she told herself it was because he was so like Alderic.

His step upon the stair made her heart flutter wildly; she often wondered her heart did not break when he spoke to her suddenly.

If she saw him caress his wife, the hot blood mounted to her cheeks, and she sought safety in instant flight. She could not endure it.

"How can I see other women content in the priceless love of their husband, while I, who have loved so madly, so purely, and so blindly, was so cruelly deceived, shut out from the arms that should have been my shield!" she cried out to herself.

If she saw a father returning from his work with his little child upon his shoulder, or happy parents leading a little child between them, she would cry out like a wounded bird; the pain was more than she could bear.

People wondered why the beautiful companion of pretty Mrs. Ulvesford always drooped her head when anyone chanced to mention how dearly fathers loved their little sons, watched over them, planned for them, and were so proud of them. They thought the beautiful Mrs. Ross was thinking of some far-off grave.

Ah! if there had been a grave; but there was none. Her husband walked the smiling earth, unconscious, uncaring of the love of a little son.

It was strange, but she never once imagined Alderic

clasping another in his arms, or another woman basking in the love that was her own.

"He is my husband," she told herself; that thought alone seemed to shut out any such possibility from her mind.

One morning Izetta, from her window, saw Ulmont Ulvesford kiss his wife good-bye on the portico; he was to be gone but one day, only a few hours. Izetta noticed how even so slight a separation grieved them; the memory of that kiss almost drove her mad.

For hours she paced the floor of her room. Such a torrent of passionate tears welled up from her tortured heart! She had no one but baby to whom she could turn in her loneliness for sympathy, and even baby's face oft-time reminded her alarmingly of—Ulmont Ulvesford.

Suddenly she caught sight of her own agonized face in an opposite mirror, and her soul was filled with wonder.

She had suffered the keenest and most poignant grief, because she had seen a young husband lovingly kiss his own wife.

Then the startling truth burst upon her; she must leave or she would go mad.

How dare such thoughts stir her bosom when she thought of the husband of Loraine Ulvesford, or met the glance of his keen, blue eyes fixed upon her face.

Izetta threw herself down on her knees beside baby Ulmont's couch and prayed Heaven to pardon the sin of her own wild, thoughtless fancies.

She was drifting on toward the brink of her destiny; there was but a dim shadowy outline separating the present from that future.

Izetta bathed her eyes, pressed her lips to sleeping Ulmont's snowy forehead and went down to the morning-room, where she knew Mrs. Ulvesford awaited her.

Loraine sat with some pretty worsted-work in her hand, but as Izetta entered she threw it aside.

"You shall read to me," she said; "I am very dull; after that we will make out those invitations for the lawn *fete* for the first of May. Guess how long you have been here, Izetta."

"Quite four months, I believe."

"Yes, a little over four months, yet you are as shy and reserved as on the first day you came. My husband was saying only yesterday that he wondered where in the world you were hiding yourself; he has seen you but twice since you have been at the manor. I really must protest against this, Mrs. Ross; you are too pretty to immure yourself from the world in this fashion."

"Believe me, Mrs. Ulvesford, the greatest happiness I

can find is administering to your wishes or baby's comfort; there are moments when, thus employed, I quite forget my sorrow."

"Do you never long for some of the brightness that makes other women's lives?" asked Loraine.

"No," answered Izetta, wearily, "why should I?"

"Why, by right of your youth and loneliness. When the strains of a waltz and merry tripping feet fall upon your ear, is there no throbbing of your heart to break away from the gloom that surrounds you and mingle with the gay throng—to feast your eyes on the brilliancy, the bloom, and beauty?"

"No," replied Izetta; "I should feel out of place; I should not care for it; my one great longing would be to escape it."

Loraine looked at the beautiful, foreign face, so exquisite in its rich, dark coloring, and she thought how mistaken the poets were when they chose dark-eyed women as their ideals of passionate love. They do not see the brightness and gayety; they see only the somber side of life, these sad, dark, dreamy-eyed women.

Loraine could not believe that down in the turbulent depths of their hearts there lay such a whirlpool of love as would have made her shudder at its mighty depths, only awaiting the whirlwind of some tragic event to lash it into a raging tempest.

At last, simply to gratify Loraine, Izetta promised to attend the lawn *fete.*

Loraine was busy with a thousand plans for the coming summer.

"You must decide the most important cases for me, Izetta," she said, with a blush; "you know this is my first summer at home."

"We must make it a memorable one on that account," answered Izetta.

"The first of May," said Loraine, poising her pen on her dainty fingers; "we will set the *fete* down for the first day in May. I love the sweet month of May; yet once it brought me the greatest sorrow I had ever known."

"No one would think you had ever known a single care," said Izetta, turning her dark, sympathetic eyes wonderingly, questioningly on Loraine's face.

"Yes," continued Loraine, "I was to have been married last May. Ulmont was abroad, but was expected home on the tenth, our marriage was set for the fifteenth."

Izetta started slightly; she remembered she was married on the tenth of May.

"The steamer was detained, I believe, or for some unex-

plainable reason he reached port late in the afternoon of what was to have been our wedding-day. Just as he landed he was immediately summoned to his mother's bedside: although I lived but ten miles distant, no one sent for me, lest the shock on my wedding-day would prove too much for me. I did not know she was ill, and expected her each moment at my home. I awaited my love in my bridal robes. I can never describe to you the long, weary hours I waited; still he came not."

Loraine crossed over to where Izetta sat, standing before her like a beautiful statue carved in marble; and with a sudden motion her white hands were clasped round her rival's neck.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PORTRAIT.

"IZETTA," whispered Loraine, "you will never realize what I suffered, on what was to have been my bridal eve, for the lover-bridegroom who came not. People look upon my face and say, with a smile: 'Her life has been sweet and dreamy, like a poem; no cloud has ever fallen athwart her sunshine.' Nobody except poor mamma knew that I lived the agony of a life-time in those few hours: at last a messenger came, breaking the terrible news. He was at Ulvesford Mansion, lying dangerously wounded by a fall over the cliff into the raging sea."

There was no lack of sympathy in the dark eyes which gazed into Loraine's, expressed more kindly than words would have done.

"I never knew a happy moment until he recovered; you cannot wonder why I tremble so when he leaves my sight. Do you know, Izetta, that if anything were to happen to my husband I should pray Heaven that I might die!"

"You must not have such strange thoughts, Mrs. Ulvesford; nothing could happen to your husband; nothing could separate you."

"So *you* thought, Izetta, when *your* husband parted from *you*."

"That was a sadly different case, Mrs. Ulvesford, *your* husband *loves you*."

Loraine shuddered at the pitiful wail in the sweet, young voice.

"I should droop and die without Ulmont's love," whispered Loraine. "Mrs. Ross," she exclaimed, coming nearer, her fair face eloquent with emotion, "I often wonder if God does not disapprove of so great a love as is mine. I cannot find words to express to you how dearly I love Ulmont. I could not be like those noble women of old who

have given up their love for duty; I should fling myself in the dust at his feet and pray him to take the life which was not worth the living—without his love."

"You are fanciful, Mrs. Ulvesford, you are as pale as death," cried Izetta, in alarm.

"The very thought of such a possibility makes me weak and faint," shuddered Loraine.

"Believe me, you are entertaining impossibilities in your thoughts; we must banish them at once," said Izetta cheerfully; continuing: "Now that we have finished the invitations, shall we not examine the new silks which arrived for you yesterday?"

Again, like the April sunshine, Loraine's fair, flower-like face cleared, and Izetta saw she had quite forgotten, almost the next moment, in beholding the shimmering silks, her late gloomy fancies.

"I have a surprise for you, Izetta," she cried gayly; "I did not anticipate your refusal to attend my lawn *fete*, and have ordered a special costume for the occasion for you. Stop! do not thank me, Izetta; you will quite overwhelm me if you do."

"It is *you* who quite overwhelm *me*, Mrs. Ulvesford; I—I do not deserve such kindness at your hands—I have done so little to merit it."

Loraine playfully placed her white fingers above the red, quivering lips, holding up a jaunty, amber silk, with here and there a dash of the richest, softest, and darkest crimson.

"I knew how superbly this costume would set off that piquant, foreign face. Stop! I command you to hear me through," she said, laughingly: I wanted your dark, rich coloring as a foil to my own colorless face."

"Mrs. Ulvesford——"

Loraine continued, laughingly:

"You must not think that my kindness, as you are pleased to term it, sprang from an exactly generous impulse; but mind," she added roguishly, "you are not to outshine me, you know."

"That would be as impossible, my dear Mrs. Ulvesford, as for the dark, starless night to eclipse the fair, smiling, sun-radiant day," Izetta exclaimed, earnestly.

Loraine shook her golden curls coquettishly; still she was quite willing to be convinced.

How little either of these two women realized how bitter the struggle was to be between them; the one, proud haughty, beautiful, and wilful; the other sweet, submissive, meekly lovely, and loveable.

They were well matched. Loraine, the capricious beauty, was in quite a quandary as to what to wear.

"I want something new and startling; you must decide for me, Izetta."

"If it rests with me," said Izetta, "I should not hesitate in selecting this white, silvery gauze."

"Do you think it would suit me?"

"Perfectly."

"I do not like the half-sleeves and bared shoulders," answered Loraine, ruefully.

"I did not notice the neck and sleeves," answered Izetta; "if it only had a covering of lace at the throat, the effect would be charming."

"I have a lace fichu somewhere, quite yellow with age; do you think we could make it answer?"

"That would be very appropriate indeed, and with a bunch of white heath or heliotrope on the breast, would form so pleasing a picture, that the guests who saw you would never forget the lovely apparition."

"You sweet little flatterer," exclaimed Loraine; "you will make me exceedingly vain. You may go to the old chest in my room and bring the fichu—we will look at the effect anyhow; the chest is not locked."

Izetta little dreamed that that one event was the turning-point of her life; and fair Loraine, the golden-haired, beloved young wife, knew not that she had spoken the words which were to be the death-warrant of her love, her life her home, and happiness.

The sweet odor of May blossoms stole in at the open window. The yellow canary in its gilded-cage coquetted with the crimson-breasted robin swaying two and fro on the budding cedar boughs hard by, as if the cruelest blow that could be stricken at a human heart was not about to fall.

"I call that my 'curiosity shop,'" said Loraine, gayly; "I have no idea of the contents of it; some day, Izetta you shall assort its contents for me; you will find no end of interesting bric-a-brac; the histories of many of these *souvenirs* are wonderfully romantic; among the *debris* you will come across a bunch of faded forget-me-nots, to which is attached a card with the initials H. H. The person whose name those initials represent was a beau of mine. You look surprised, Izetta," she added, with a gay laugh; "oh, I assure you I was quite a belle before I married; why, the poor fellow who sent those flowers quite refused to be comforted. We met him abroad; I would scarcely have recognized him he was so changed, and all for love of me," sighed Loraine, pityingly; "'twas said he lingered long over the wine-cup; I do not know how true that was; though he was to accompany Ulmont and me on our return trip home, he failed to join us, and I afterward read

in the papers that he was dangerously wounded in a duel on the slippery Alpine heights the evening before we left. I never knew if he recovered, although I have repeatedly searched the foreign exchanges. You will find among the rest a faded lily; shall I tell you why I prize that above all else?"

"Yes," answered Izetta, taking up the lily which lay in a crimson velvet bed.

"Because," whispered Loraine, with a faint flush, "I wore that twined in my hair on the evening Ulmont asked me to be his wife; he was going abroad on the morrow.

"'Give me that lily, Loraine,' he said, 'and I shall wear it over my heart; whenever I gaze upon it I shall remember my Loraine's golden curls have rested against its white petals and its golden cup.' That is the reason that faded flower is beyond all price to me," she said, softly.

At last the fichu was found. As Izetta shook out its filmy folds, something dropped into her lap, hitting the wedding-ring she wore with a clear, musical sound. Carelessly she stretched forth her hands to clasp it.

Loraine never forgot the wild, terrified cry that broke from Izetta's lips as she held up at arm's length a pearl portrait of a woman's face upon the petal of a graceful lily, her drooping curls wound round the stem and mingling with its golden calyx.

One sharp, jagged end had pierced her tender hand in falling, the hand which wore her marriage-ring.

"My husband painted that portrait," said Loraine, proudly.

"Alderic, Alderic," moaned Izetta, faintly; the next moment she lay white and motionless at Loraine Ulvesford's feet.

Heaven pity her, the wronged young wife and mother, the plaything of fate, more cruel than the grave in its bitter sting!

Kind hands bore Izetta to her chamber, placing her on the couch beside little Ulmont, who gazed in baby wonder at the still, white face of her who was wont to caress him.

Was it kind of Heaven that the terrible stroke had not killed her then and there; was it kind she should struggle back to life when death would have been such a relief to her?

Loraine had left the room in charge of the nurse an hour before. And the good old nurse wondered why the dark eyes bore such an expression of agony in their depths.

"Can I do anything for you, Mrs. Ross?" she inquired, and the answer came in a pitiful wail:

"Yes; leave me alone; it is the greatest kindness you

can do me," and the beautiful face was turned toward the wall.

Still the attendant was loth to leave her alone; all the years of her life she had been used to seeing sickness and sorrow, but she had never seen such terrible woe in a human face before. A sudden fear crossed her mind.

"If I leave you alone," she said, "promise me you will do nothing rash. I do not know what great sorrow has come to you, but try to remember, for your baby's sake, that you must bear up bravely. Have you forgotten your little baby in your sorrow, lady?"

"No," exclaimed Izetta, "it was of him I was thinking most; God help him; I shall go mad if I think of my poor little child," she cried.

Once more she was shut out from the gaze of mortal eyes—she was alone; had not little Ulmont been there, whom she loved, to claim her attention, her reason must certainly have left her.

Loraine Ulvesford's voice still rang in her ears, saying: "My husband painted that portrait."

Izetta leaned far out into the summer night, gazing up into the starry heavens.

"It was Alderic, *my* husband, who painted that portrait," she cried, wildly.

Her thoughts flashed through her brain like lightning.

How came Loraine Ulvesford with that portrait? Was she dreaming? Ah! the face of the portrait, where had she seen one like it?

Merciful Heaven! it was the smiling face of Loraine which she had seen in the hand of Alderic, her husband; which Alderic, her husband, had worn on his breast.

Izetta's breath came quick and hot; the blood leaped through her veins like molten lead; the very air seemed seething with all-consuming fire, bathing her very soul in its fiery caldron.

There could be no mistake; was not the very jagged corner proof positive? Izetta held the portrait tightly clinched in her hand when she had swooned, and they had not taken it from her.

She saw the portrait like a mocking, jeering falsehood coolly confronting her upon the table. She thought of that jagged edge of pearl she had so carefully treasured.

In another instant she held them in her hand; would those rough edges meet? God pity her, in another instant she would know.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHICH WAS HIS WIFE.

HOPING almost against hope, Izetta caught up the portrait.

Oh, cruelest of cruel evidence, the jagged edges fitted each other exactly; this was no dream, but a terrible reality forced upon her.

The face, the form, the voice of Ulmont Ulvesford were so like Alderic, the husband who had abandoned her to the cold mercies of the pitiless world, the husband who had cast her adrift, with a smile on his lips and the blackest of falsehoods in his heart. The very breeze seemed whispering the startling thought.

Great God, it could not be true.

Ulmont Ulvesford and Alderic, her husband, could not be one and the same.

"This one has fair hair; Alderic's was dark," she cried; "and brother or other kindred he had none; he was the last of his race."

The very enormity of the terrible discovery which was dawning upon her almost drove her mad.

If Loraine's husband was Alderic, did he not know her? If he was her husband, how could he be the husband of Loraine?

"If this is Alderic," she cried, "Great Heaven, which of us is his wife?"

The low breathing of little Ulmont aroused her; the thought of baby was the keenest thrust of all.

"For baby's sake," she whispered, "I must probe this mystery to the very bottom."

Izetta drew herself up proudly to her full height; she forgot the wild, passionful love she had borne her husband in the face of the foul wrong that had been done the deserted wife.

"This cannot be Alderic," she wailed, "the husband of another—for am not I his wife before God and man? The very Heaven that bends above us, and the listening angels can bear witness to my marriage. I would have flung myself into the stormy ocean before I would have bent myself to even a shadow of wrong in thought or action. I have always held my honor stainless. I shall not believe it sullied now. Heaven could not have been so cruel. I could not hope to meet my angel mother above, if a stain lay on my soul."

A great torrent of tears welled up from the dark eyes, bringing no relief.

She flung herself down on the couch, her long dark hair falling around her like a veil, moaning out:

"Alderic, Alderic! oh, cruel love, better I had died in infancy upon my mother's breast, than live to suffer this!"

All the long summer night Izetta paced the floor, love, horror, and bitterest despair struggling in her heart for supremacy. Scenes such as that have made gentle, loving woman, the bitterest, most revengeful of foes.

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

It was strange her overcharged young heart did not burst then and there. How strange life should cling to her so tenaciously, when she wanted so much to die; she told herself she had not strength to live.

"My poor little Ulmont," she said, laying her hot cheek against baby's; "'tis well you are a boy; I could not have left an innocent little girl to have been thrown out on the mercies of relentless fate. Which would have been the worst crime, to have taken her with me in her innocent, spotless babyhood, or to have realized she would be buffeted about by adversity; and, if too weak to cling to life and hope, would not some cruel, blighting hand have struck her down like a reed in the storm? Thank Heaven, you are a boy, my sweet little one," she murmured. "I am very grateful for that boon. There is but one course left us, baby," she whispered. "We must leave this place at once; we will utter no word of the terrible wrong that has been done us!"

Izetta had read deep, tragic sorrows that had come to the lives of women, but she never remembered to have read of one as pitiful as her own.

How dared he gaze upon her face or the face of her child if he be Alderic, who had pledged himself so solemnly to the dying to protect her?

If she could only settle the question of the fair hair to her satisfaction, she would go forth with her child upon her arm and confront him, flinging out her wrongs that the whole wide world might know; crying out:

"See! this is the man who married me but to forsake me in my greatest need—and, lo! I find him the husband of another!"

Ah, this was why each caress he had given Loraine entered her heart like a dagger thrust.

She remembered, with a burning flush, how he had pressed his false, fair, smiling lips to Loraine's, but yesternoon at parting, while she, his wife, stood by.

She had heard of the daring treachery of men, but this exceeded her wildest imagination; all other crimes paled before this.

Izetta knew Loraine would soon come, or send to see if she were better.

"She would never be better now," she told herself, "until she died."

How could she look into Loraine's fair face, knowing she had stolen her husband's love from her, the love which had been her very life?

God help these two fair, proud women; 'twas hard to judge between them; who could tell which breast would feel the deadly arrow's stroke the keener?

If this indeed be Alderic, Izetta could but pity poor, deceived Loraine; she had not forgotten that 'twas she who sheltered her that night from the pitiless storm. She wished devoutly she had perished out in the cold and the snow.

At that moment she heard Loraine's step in the corridor; she knew full well the dainty tapping of the little slippered feet.

"May I come in, Izetta, please?"

"Yes," answered Izetta, and she was startled at the hoarseness and hollowness of her own voice.

Loraine tripped lightly across the room to where she sat; the very room seemed brighter for her presence there.

"You are better this morning, are you not, Izetta? I had hardly expected to find you up and dressed so early."

Loraine drew back with a startled cry at the white, haggard face raised up to her own.

Izetta did not tell her she had not laid her weary head upon the pillow all the long night through.

"I was frightened about you last night; but I am still more frightened about you this morning. All the bloom has left your face; you look like a rose suddenly withered by an unexpected frost. If you have a secret sorrow, Izetta, tell me, could I lighten it in any way for you?"

A sudden impulse seized Izetta to unburden the terrible secret to Loraine, but it was instantly abandoned. She could not bear that the fair face of the only being who had been kind and gentle toward her, should turn from her in horror and amazement, at the accusations she would bring against her husband's honor.

"No, no, not yet," Izetta told herself; "she must think first what would be best."

A sudden thought occurred to her; she would speak to Loraine about her husband's hair; the suspense of the terrible mystery was killing her.

"Did you tell me, Mrs. Ulvesford, your husband painted that portrait?" asked Izetta, pointing toward the table on which it lay.

"Yes," answered Loraine, always pleased to speak of

her husband. "He painted it while he was abroad in Italy, I believe, and quite from memory, too."

There was no mistaking the face; anyone could see Loraine was certainly the original.

"How strange it seems, Mrs. Ulvesford," said Izetta, in a low voice, striving to appear calm, "that you should have preferred a—a—husband with fair hair so like your own."

Loraine laughed a little, jolly laugh, replying:

"That is quite the amusing part of our romance. I always tell Ulmont I could never have fallen in love with a fair-haired suitor. Why, when we were first engaged, his hair was brown, a dark, glossy, nut-brown."

Loraine did not notice that the white, drooping face turned away from her was pale as death.

"I have a pretty portrait of my husband, the way he used to look; it is quite amusing to see the two pictures together, curiously alike, yet so unlike. Come to my room, you shall see them."

Izetta followed her like one in a dream.

"There," said Loraine, drawing aside the heavy silken curtains, "here they are side by side."

Izetta raised her eyes to the fatal picture. No word or cry escaped her; she seemed as if turned to stone.

No mustache concealed the proud mouth, whose every curve she remembered so well, and the dark-brown hair clustered about the brow of Alderic.

She had hoped against hope, prayed blindly to Heaven that this might be a mere coincidence; all hope lay crushed; the last straw was broken. She was face to face with the terrible truth. Ulmont Loraine's husband and Alderic were one.

In that critical ordeal the promise she had given blind Marguirette came back to her.

"If ever you meet the one whom you have called husband, promise me that you will do nothing, say nothing, on the impulse of the moment."

Izetta knew that hour had now come to her; she would not break the promise she had given.

"You look so white and wretched. I beg you to go back to your room and lie down again; you are not yet rested. I can get on nicely without you. I am expecting mother to drive over from Lorrimer Hall to-day, and Ulmont will return by dusk. I shall fill in the time very nicely," urged Loraine.

Glad of escaping to her own room again, Izetta consented to rest. She wanted time to think.

"I will take my child away at once," she said, bitterly.

"He shall never again look upon the face of the child he has so cruelly wronged."

How his words taunted her.

"I should not like to part with the little child," he had said. "Indeed, I think him the handsomest little fellow I have ever seen."

She concluded to take little Ulmont to blind Marguirette's cottage that very night; then she would come back and confront her guilty husband.

A terrible idea occurred to her in her bewilderment and agony; she was rendered desperate by the thought of the cruel wrongs that had been done her.

"Heaven help me!" she cried out bitterly. "Whatever happens, I cannot hold myself accountable for my actions; my very sufferings cry out to Heaven for vengeance!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOR HER CHILD'S SAKE.

Had it not been for her child, Izetta would have crept silently away from the home which should have been hers and little Ulmont's in the dead of night.

"For my child's sake I must act differently," she told herself. A strong fear was upon her that he might attempt to keep her child.

No! she must guard against that at all events. She would take the child at once to Silvernook. She hastily wrapped a thick, dark shawl around him and bore him from the room.

If she met anyone, she could say she was taking baby out for an airing in the grounds. No one would question her except Loraine; she must certainly avoid meeting her.

Izetta took the path that led around by the carriage drive. She would certainly meet no one there, she told herself.

She had scarcely proceeded a dozen rods ere she came face to face with Mrs. Lorrimer, who was leisurely driving her pony-phaeton along the highway.

A dark frown crossed the lady's face as her glance fell upon the child; she inclined her stately head in a cold, formal bow in Izetta's direction, touched her pony lightly with her whip, and was soon lost to sight beyond the lime trees.

Izetta tremblingly clasped little Ulmont closer to her breast, speeding quickly onward.

She was greatly fatigued when she reached Silvernook, which was about dusk; and her arm's ached with Ulmont's weight.

It had been long months since she had trodden those

grassy lanes; how much suffering she had passed through since then?

Izetta crept softly up the walk that led to the flute-maker's door. A cheerful, home-like picture met her gaze.

Marguirette sat at the spinning-wheel and Abel sat near her, puffing great wreaths of smoke from his stumpy pipe. Her keen ear had detected cautious, approaching footsteps.

"There is some one at the door, Abel," she said; "see who it is."

Izetta stole softly in, as Amy had done—the poor Amy, whom the blind, patient mother so sadly mourned.

"Mrs. Moore," she said, softly, "I have come back to you, but I am not alone. I have brought my little child."

Izetta never forgot the cheery welcome she received at that humble cottage, a welcome that came from the very depths of their hearts, and, like a weary child, she sobbed out her sorrows on faithful Marguirette's honest breast.

She told her of her wanderings and of her persecution; how she had lost her way in the terrible storm while on her journey to Silvernook, and had found shelter at Ulvesford Mansion, but a few miles distant; but she could not bring herself to divulge the terrible discovery she had made; she could not tell them that at Ulvesford Manor she had found her husband. Ah, no; she could not tell them that!

"What is the little one's name?" asked Marguirette, patting the little, curly head; "what do you call him?"

"Ulmont," said Izetta, in a voice she strove vainly to steady.

"Is he named after the master of Ulvesford Mansion?" questioned Marguirette.

"His wife gave him that name," answered Izetta, in a low, quivering voice, deep flushes burning her pale face at the startling truth.

Strange, she had not thought of it before.

"Will you keep little Ulmont here for a few days, Mrs. Moore? I will pay you well for it. I must return to the manor to-night."

"To-night?" echoed both Abel and Marguirette, in astonishment.

"Yes," she replied, firmly, "to-night."

"Bless the dear little fellow," said Marguirette, crying softly over him; "of course I will keep him for you, Izetta; but do not speak of money; poor as we are, I could not take it; the happiness of having this little form resting against my lonely breast, if but for a day or an hour, is all I ask."

It was with the greatest difficulty Izetta induced the aged couple to accept the money of which they stood in such need.

Assurance of her keen displeasure and refusal to leave Ulmont under any other condition alone persuaded them.

Marguirette forbore from questioning Izetta; she had full faith in the motive which prompted her actions.

"I shall not remain here longer than to night," she said, hesitatingly; "then I will tell you what course I have decided upon for little Ulmont's future and my own."

Izetta resolved to take the stage back to Boston; by so doing she could reach there a little after dusk; she was nerving herself bravely for the ordeal of seeing Ulmont Ulvesford and confronting him with his crime, of which she had been the innocent dupe, that very night.

The old flute-maker accompanied her to the cross-roads, where they found the Boston and Silvernook stage in waiting.

"I shall be sure to come to-morrow evening," said Izetta, leaning out of the doorway to shake Abel's outstretched hand; "perhaps a little later, and alone; yet I will be sure to come."

The lumbering stage-coach was barely lost to sight in the distance, ere a man emerged from the dense copsewood that skirted the roadside.

There were none near to hear him. He laughed a low, mocking laugh.

"Ah, coquettish dame fate," he cried, "now you are kind. You goad us on to madness by your frowns, but when you smile—ah! how you smile upon us mortals! How little did I think when I rowed my boat to this sequestered spot that I should meet my pretty little runaway beauty. My sweet Izetta will come here, alone, at dusk to-morrow eve, eh?"

He laughed again, long and loud.

"But she shall not leave it alone, for I will bear her company!"

Heath Hampton, for it was he, gazed at the foot of the alder bushes where he had secreted his golden treasures.

There was naught but the night winds to hear his plans, he told himself, why should he not speak out?

"Ah! why indeed?" whispered the fickle winds.

"I will have my boat and a thick, dark cloak in waiting to-morrow eve," he soliloquized; "I will wrap it quickly about her; struggle then, my sweet, as much as you like, 'twill be in vain. I will be as deaf to your prayers and entreaties as you were to mine. There was a time I might have been kind; but when you scorned my love you awoke a slumbering demon who will make you his wife, curb

your proud spirit, tame your pride, bend your will to subjection, though it breaks your heart. Ay, and a thousand hearts as well. By the time the sun shall break upon another morrow, we shall be far away from the shores of America, my bonny jewel. I risk much by loitering a single hour upon American soil. There do I peril my very liberty for you, my sweet, thankless Izetta!"

Flattering himself that his plans were laid well and deeply, Heath Hampton quickly re-entered his boat, and with long, sweeping, energetic strokes pushed out in the direction of Hampton Place.

As the solemn darkness shut him out of sight, Vatal, the dwarf, crept from his place of concealment.

Not a word or a motion had escaped his attention. He deftly commenced the search for the hidden treasure; long and patiently he worked; the moon rose, its friendly rays piercing the dense gloom.

At last his hand came in contact with the coveted prize; quickly he removed it, heaping the earth back into its place.

He grasped the box firmly under his arm, wiping the perspiration from his damp brow as he stooped down, untied his own boat, and clambered hastily into it.

"Farewell, cold, heartless woman," he cried shaking his finger in the direction of Hampton Court, "farewell, thou meanest and most dastardly of sons—I have been your dupe too long; your sins shall recoil on your own reckless heads!"

He rested his arms thoughtfully a moment on his oars. A beautiful, innocent, pleading face rose up before him.

"Miss Rienzi was the only one who was ever kind to me," he muttered.

Suddenly he put his hand up to his brow.

"I have not the courage to do it," he whispered to himself; "I dare not!"

He devoutly wished in his heart that the dastardly plan of Heath Hampton might be frustrated on the morrow; then he struck out down the stream in quite an opposite direction from Hampton Place.

Loraine Ulvesford stood on the veranda, which opened out upon a broad view of that self-same river, watching the gleaming stars as they mirrored themselves in the bosom of the rippling water; the hours were drawing on; dusk had settled into darkness, she was still waiting for her husband.

She saw a dark shadow flit quickly down the stream with the tide. She little knew 'twas an evil omen crossing her life.

It was the boat of Vatal, the dwarf.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GUILTY OR INNOCENT.

It wanted a quarter to eight as Izetta noiselessly re-entered her room.

No baby Ulmont was there to welcome her, yet she felt she had done wisely in secreting him.

She knew it was Ulmont Ulvesford's custom to repair to the smoking-room immediately after dining; if not there she could with safety leave a note there for him.

Izetta hastily tore a leaf from her memorandum, writing hastily the following lines:

"Mr. Ulmont Ulvesford,—Have the courtesy to meet me to-night in the lilac grove that borders the park. I have the right to *demand* this interview, which I could have forced upon you without warning had I so chosen, but scorned to do. I shall await you there immediately upon your receipt of this, which will probably be between eight and nine. Izetta Ross."

God pity her! how many times she had gone over in her mind what her meeting with Alderic would be like; how she should tell him of her deep, deathless love which had clung to him through all; how she would lay her tired head upon his shoulder and whisper to him of another who claimed his love, her precious little Ulmont—their child!

All that bright dream was over now; its ruins lay scattered at her feet. She could breathe no word of the love which consumed her. She must hear his voice and know another claimed him.

It was strange that through all she still clung to the belief that *her* marriage was legal.

"If not, I shall hear it from his own lips," she whispered, falteringly.

If so a great wrong had been done her, she believed her heart would break then and there.

It did not matter much what happened after that; she could not rest nor breathe while even the faintest shadow hovered over the fair name of her innocent child. She forgot all else in the dark sorrows of the outraged wife and mother.

The lights were not lit in either library or smoking-room; the long, French windows were thrown wide open, and the flickering moonbeams bathed each room in its pale, white light.

Izetta nervously entered the library, her dark eyes scanning the deep, shadowy corners with a hurried glance.

It seemed quite deserted save by her own presence.

She could hear Ulmont and Loraine's laughter out on the lawn; he was evidently not in the smoking-room.

She glided down the long drawing-room with a beating heart. So intense was her excitement her dress brushed the low, cushioned rocker in which Mrs. Lorrimer was reclining; but Izetta did not see her. The lady turned her head slightly.

"Ah!" she muttered, quite under her breath, "Mrs. Ross again!"

She bit her lip with vexation, as she wished devoutly that the mother and child were away from Ulvesford Manor with their dark, sparkling, foreign faces.

"This is the creature Loraine tells me is lying dangerously ill in her room, when I have just met her stealing stealthily down the carriage drive; all the long day she does not make her appearance, and now in the darkness of night she steals down to the library. What does she here, I wonder?"

She fairly held her breath upon seeing Izetta proceed directly toward the smoking-room. The door stood open and she fearlessly entered.

From the reflection in an opposite mirror Mrs. Lorrimer saw her draw from her bosom a white envelope which she placed beside the match-safe on the mantel, then turned, with the fleetness of a startled deer, disappearing through the long, open window and down the lilac path in the moonlight.

A strange light gleamed in Mrs. Lorrimer's eyes.

"I must breathe no word of this to my poor Loraine," she thought; "I must act upon my own judgment."

Mrs. Lorrimer was a proud and conscientious lady, who would have scorned to do a mean act; yet for the sake of her idolized Loraine she told herself she must know the contents of the letter which had been secretly conveyed to her daughter's husband under cover of night; she felt fully justified in acquainting herself with its contents.

There are women who would have raged and stormed nad they read the contents of that note; she did nothing of the kind; for an instant she held it over the gas jet.

"No," she said, crushing the letter in her hand, "I will not do *that*. I will go myself and confront her. I will wring from her lips the secret she holds, force her to tell by what right she dares *demand* an interview with the husband of Loraine."

She threw a dark shawl quickly over her head, crushing the letter in her tight grasp as though it were the life of the hapless girl whom she was going forth to meet.

At each step she took her fierce fury fanned itself into

new flame. There was little mercy in the mother's heart when she thought of her trusting Loraine.

As the lioness, the tigress, and the panther are aroused when danger threatens their young, a terrible fury was lashing the heart of Loraine's mother as she hurriedly approached the lilac path, where she knew she should find Izetta Ross.

As Izetta heard the hurried footsteps, her heart beat cruelly; they stopped suddenly before her.

Izetta stood quite still, with clasped hands and eyes downcast, the tall lilac bushes tossing their fragrant, purple plumes above her dark, flowing hair.

She had hoped Alderic, as she still called him in her thoughts, would break the torturous, embarrassing silence.

Slowly she raised her dark eyes, not to the face of Alderic, but to the stormy, wrathful face of Mrs. Lorrimer.

The faint cry died away on her lips, making no sound.

"I flatter myself I have disturbed what you intended to be a very charming *tete-a-tete*, Mrs. Ross. Perhaps it will suprise you to learn that I saw you place this letter in the smoking-room. We will waive all question as to my actions in regard to it and come to the point at once. I demand to know by what right you solicit this secret interview with Ulmont Ulvesford. I have said to Loraine, beware lest the serpent, whom you have warmed and fed, does not turn upon the hand that gave it shelter. She gave you life, and you, false-hearted woman, would stab her heart with a blow worse than death itself!"

For a moment, deep, crimson flushes came and went over Izetta's fair face; then she drew herself up proudly to her full height.

"I cannot tell you, madam—I dare not," she replied.

"Cannot and dare not! Those are strong words," retorted Mrs. Lorrimer, ironically. "I shall know what secret intrigue you are attempting, vile woman, if I have to wring it from your false lips!"

"Spare me, oh, spare me your reproaches, madam," murmured Izetta, tearfully, her white hands working convulsively; "I beseech you, by the love you bear Loraine, do not torture the terrible secret from me!"

"Do you know what I fully intend to do? I shall have you prosecuted to the full extent of the law for your vile scheme!"

Izetta raised her hand supplicatingly.

"Mercy, madam," she whispered, "I beg of you to spare me!"

"Mercy," sneered the irate mother; "what mercy would

you show my poor Loraine, were it in your power? You are a scheming adventuress; cunningly you laid your plans to gain an entrance into this home!"

"As Heaven is my judge, madam, I——"

"Stop," commanded Mrs. Lorrimer, sternly, "it is not for such as you to call upon Heaven to hear you."

"Madam," responded Izetta, sadly, "believe me, had I known what I now know, I should have flung myself into the depths of yonder silent river rather than cross this threshold."

The cold, taunting laugh of Mrs. Lorrimer stung her almost to madness as she continued:

"Why did you not add—you did not dream Ulmont Ulvesford had such a charming young wife?"

"God help me, no, I did not know that," moaned Izetta.

"Yet, with your false arts, you would seek to win him from her," cried Mrs. Lorrimer, hoarsely.

"No," answered Izetta, "I never did that, madam. I—I——"

"Well?" questioned her companion, grimly.

"I avoided him," responded Izetta.

Again Mrs. Lorrimer laughed, that peculiar, taunting laugh, pointing grimly to the note she held crushed in her hand.

"This certainly looks like it," she said.

"I wanted to look upon his face just once, madam," she said, brokenly; "then I would be content to go away, breathing no word, and die."

The woful agony in the young voice did not reach the heart of the impassioned mother.

"Speak, girl!" cried Mrs. Lorrimer, grasping Izetta firmly, cruelly, by both shoulders. "What is Ulmont Ulvesford to you?"

"I cannot tell you—I must not for Loraine's sake."

"Do not mention my pure Loraine!" shrieked the irate mother; "don't dare to mention her, I say. Once again I ask you to divulge this secret."

"And I repeat I cannot," said Izetta, in a low, trembling voice.

The sorrow of that beautiful, drooping face was lost in the intense anger of Mrs. Lorrimer's heart.

"I say I shall know what all this means, miss or Mrs.—Heaven best knows which of the two names you have the right to bear."

"Yes!" cried Izetta, drawing herself up proudly, and answering in clear, ringing tones, "Heaven does know! I am an honorable wife!"

"A precious example of an honorable wife, forsooth, making appointments with other ladies' husbands!"

"Madam!" cried Izetta, hoarsely, "if you will hear, if you will goad me on to madness, know, then, why I have sought this interview with Ulmont Ulvesford." Her voice rang out in a sharp, agonizing cry. "Hear me, Mrs. Lorrimer!" she cried, "and may God in Heaven judge if I speak falsely! Ulmont Ulvesford is my husband."

CHAPTER XXXV.

AM A LAWFUL WIFE.

"ARE you mad!" cried Mrs. Lorrimer, recoiling as though a sudden blow had been struck her.

"No," answered Izetta, solemnly, "I am not mad, I have spoken the solemn truth, I am Ulmont Ulvesford's lawful wife."

"'Tis false!" shrieked Mrs. Lorrimer. "If an angel cried it, trumpet-tongued, I would not believe it. You have forgotten, girl, that you are speaking of—my daughter's husband."

"Hear me, Mrs. Lorrimer," said Izetta, in a clear, calm voice. "A year ago Ulmont Ulvesford and I crossed from Italy in the same steamer, the *White Cresson*. One midnight, as we neared the American port, my grandfather fell back in my arms in the throes of death. A young man stood near us on the deck leaning over the rails; poor grandfather beckoned him to us and whispered that he was dying. 'I will soon be gone,' he cried, 'and my child will be alone. I cannot die and leave her unprotected; will you protect my little orphan child?' The young man promised. That man was Ulmont Ulvesford. My grandfather died that night, and I was left alone—alone but for Ulmont Ulvesford, or Alderic Ross, as he falsely called himself."

Like one fascinated, Mrs. Lorrimer's intense gaze never left her face during the brief recital; the very power of speech seemed to leave her.

"I cannot tell you what impulse prompted him; he said I should marry him, and on the evening of the 10th of May, an aged pastor married us on the silent ocean, in the moonlight, beneath the gaze of the glimmering stars and listening angels, married Ulmont Ulvesford, or Alderic Ross and me."

"The 10th of May," whispered Mrs. Lorrimer, in an awful voice: for one brief instant she was tempted to believe her, there was a world of truth in the clear, noble voice, and the pale, calm face turned unflinchingly toward her own in the moonlight; the next instant she had recovered herself.

"To say I am amazed at your mad audacity in concocting such a wild tale, but faintly expresses my indignation," cried the exasperated mother, never losing her tight hold on the girl's arm. "I wonder I do not strike you down at my feet."

"Had it not been for my child's sake I would never have spoken; I would have held the bitter secret all my whole life through," cried Izetta, vehemently.

"You are a daring woman," replied Mrs. Lorrimer, stormily. "Do you think the world would credit even for an instant your fanciful story? Do you see that path?" she added; "take it and begone, never cross this threshold again, or I will have you thrown into prison! It is worse than folly to repeat this wild tale elsewhere," she continued, mockingly. "The world would ask you to furnish proofs. Could you furnish the slightest proofs to substantiate such a base fabrication?"

Izetta staggered back against the lilac branches with a low cry, which went up to Heaven from her white lips.

"Where are your proofs?" demanded Loraine's mother, exultantly.

Heaven help her, she had none. It was one of the cruelest sights which could have been imagined upon which the great stars pityingly gazed; the white, startled face of the wronged young wife, and the haughty, experienced, worldly woman who held her at bay, turning her own weapon of safeguard against her.

"Proof," Izetta had never once given it a thought.

"You have certainly lost your reason," continued Mrs. Lorrimer, grimly, "in supposing for an instant that a man would be so insane as to bring two wives under one roof. Why, he never saw you before that stormy Christmas eve when you found shelter here. You were strangers. Had he been what you claim, you would have cried out, 'see, this is the husband who deserted me!' you did nothing of the kind; you wound yourself into the wife's heart, to learn more of the husband!"

"I—I—did not know Alde—, Mr. Ulvesford then," gasped Izetta.

"You do not adhere to your story, first you claim him as your husband, now you admit you did not know him," said Mrs. Lorrimer, sarcastically, eying the young girl crouching before her, half leaning against the lilac bushes, stunned by her cruel words.

"Alderic's—Mr. Ulvesford's hair was dark then, and he wore no mustache," faltered Izetta.

Had a thunderbolt suddenly fallen from a clear sky, Mrs. Lorrimer could not have been more astounded, the blood receded from her face, leaving it deadly pale.

With the rapidity of lightning something akin to the truth flashed upon her.

She remembered the dark-brown curls had been shorn at the time of the almost fatal accident, and the fair hair changed him wonderfully; then, most pitiful of all, she remembered that that accident had left a blank in the mind of Ulmont Ulvesford, the incidents of that past he had so fruitlessly endeavored to recall.

"Great God!" she muttered, "can this be the missing link? No," she cried, vehemently, "Heaven is not so unkind to my poor Loraine."

A great spasm of pain shot through her as she turned to Izetta in her woe. She forgot her anger, pride, everything in her agonized fear for Loraine; she only remembered she was a mother standing by, hearing her darling Loraine's honor called in jeopardy.

There was solemn truth depicted in Izetta's face; yet how could she believe her? it was beyond human nature.

She put out her hands in a groping way, and would have fallen had Izetta not caught her in her arms.

Izetta knew she was her most bitter foe, yet she felt the deepest pity for the mother's woe.

That mother was blindly praying that Loraine might not be sacrificed, come what might, she would do valiant battle for the sake of her child.

"No one would believe you," she cried out sharply. "The whole world would say it was false; you have no proofs. I will compromise with you, leave America with your child at once, and I will give you half my wealth. I will provide handsomely for your little child; when I die he shall be the heir of the Lorrimer estates. I will gladly, freely, give it, only go away. If you breathe one word of this you will break Loraine's heart. She has been little less than an angel to you; 'twas she who rescued you from the storm in which you would have perished but for her. I am a proud old woman," she cried, "but see, I kneel in the dust at your feet, I kiss the hem of your garment, I beg you to leave Loraine in peace!"

Izetta's face was white as marble as she raised the kneeling, trembling, sorrow-stricken mother to her feet.

"If it was but for my own sake I would not hesitate for an instant, Mrs. Lorrimer," she said. "I would sooner die than breathe one word of this terrible secret. My little child's honor. alone, demands that I should speak."

"God would bless and time immortalize you if you would make a sacrifice for her who succored you in your sorest need. You are a noble woman, will you make it?" groaned the unhappy mother. "Your child is a boy, his life is all before him. My child is a fair, proud woman, in

the zenith of her beauty, her love, and all that makes life worth the living. No stain ever crossed her fair name; her honor is a pearl beyond price. Oh, think, Mrs. Ross, with a man the world holds life in a different light; think, Izetta, think, while I kneel and implore you in the dust at your feet."

They could hear Loraine's sivery laughter in the distance.

"See how happy my child is," cried the frenzied mother. "Could you strike a dagger into her heart while she gazed into your eyes with her gay, happy smile; it would be kinder far to do that than to question her right to her husband's love; he is her very life!"

"Yet he is my husband," cried Izetta.

"Let God judge between you in Heaven," cried the unhappy mother. "Leave him in peace to Loraine on earth!"

A deep, bitter groan broke the terrible silence that fell between them; the drooping lilac branches were parted slowly asunder, and Ulmont Ulvesford, with a face pale as marble, on which the veins stood out like knotted cords, hurriedly stepped between them.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"SHE HAS NO PROOF."

"ULMONT!" cried Mrs. Lorrimer, springing forward, "tell me who is this woman," pointing to Izetta.

"Mother," he cried, "rise from your knees. I——"

As she looked up into his haggard face, she read something there that made her cry out with the sharpest agony.

In an awful silence that seemed the length of eternity, Ulmont Ulvesford turned to Izetta, and for one brief instant their eyes met. He spoke no word to Izetta; he addressed himself to the hapless, prostrate mother; his head fell on his breast and in his averted eyes the poor mother read her child's doom, ere the white lips answered, slowly:

"May God help my poor Loraine, she speaks the truth!"

"You dare not tell me you are married to this woman!" shrieked Mrs. Lorrimer, pointing to Izetta, who stood up proudly before them, calm as a marble statue.

Ulmont Ulvesford bowed his head, he could find no words in which to answer her.

"It is not true!" she cried, wildly; "it is a cruel jest; you are Loraine's husband, my pretty, innocent darling."

Ulmont bared his head to the cool winds of Heaven, great drops of perspiration rolled down his cheeks, the veins twitched convulsively.

"Hear but a word in my defense," he cried. "God knows I was innocent. My God! I remember all but too plainly now. I have found the missing link. Stop," he commanded, "hear me out. I married her on the impulse of the moment; a mad vow urged by the dying to protect her, but one way occurred to me, I married her, I sent my wi—, I sent her to my old nurse in Silvernook when I received the telegram that my mother was dying. I intended to crave Loraine's pardon; I knew she would forgive my rashness, you know the rest; the accident drove that past entirely from my memory. I never knew, God help me, when I led your daughter to the altar, that I had a living wife, but swiftly as memory fled it returned when I heard the accusation in a voice that pierced the dimness of the past, crying out: 'Ulmont Ulvesford is my husband!' I gave the name Alderic Ross in bitter sport. I meant when we reached Boston to tell her I was Ulmont Ulvesford; the consequences have recoiled upon my own head. Although innocent I am guilty of a crime most horrible." He spoke the words rapidly, vehemently, never once turning toward the silent figure at his right, his arms folded across his breast like one awaiting his doom.

"Ulmont!" cried the mother, clinging to the last hope, crouching at his feet, and covering his hands with passionate tears, "this girl has no proof of this, no proof whatever; for Loraine's sake, your golden-haired young wife, who loves you so, deny it, say that she is mad, 'tis a scheming plot to ruin you. Loraine will never know; the bitter truth would kill her. You might say she died of a broken-heart, but the angels in Heaven would cry out you murdered her!

"Ulmont, listen to my prayer," she wailed; "send this woman away—we will bury the terrible secret, the world shall never know—defy her to do her worst, remember she is powerless, she has no proof!"

Ulmont Ulvesford raised his eyes to Izetta's face; a bitter war was raging in his soul, such as words are powerless to express.

"I have asked no mercy for myself," said Izetta, in a clear, ringing voice—"but for the honor of our child."

Those words cut him keenly; he did not turn to his wronged young wife, and hold out his hands to her; he turned from her with a bitter groan, the name Loraine on his lips.

Loraine—his sweet, haughty, beautiful Loraine, who loved him so well, whose life he had so cruelly blighted by one rash act. Never did mortal man waver between such conflicting doubts.

Izetta had no proofs of that fatal marriage; the rector

was dead who married them. Should he cry out it was all false, and with Loraine clinging to his breast, defy her to the bitter end.

"Choose between them," cried the frantic mother.

Like a beautiful marble statue Izetta stood before him, yet she spoke no word.

"My God!" he groaned, how can I ever again feel the clinging arm of Loraine about my neck, her golden head upon my breast, hear her whisper 'my husband,' and know she is not my lawful wife, before God and man! Heaven knows I meant well, but fate has conspired against me. Was ever man placed in such a terrible position?" he groaned, "I know not which way to turn."

"Turn to Loraine, she will never know," sobbed the wretched mother.

"It would be a sin, now," he cried out, sharply, "you have forgotten she is not my wife."

His honor was his shield.

"Yet I cannot tell my pure Loraine of the great wrong I have unconsciously done her," he cried out, "she would die then and there at my feet. Give me time to think," he cried, hoarsely.

"Go to Loraine," pleaded the mother. She knew if he were to go to Loraine just then he would clasp her to his heart and defy the whole world to part them.

"No, no," he groaned, "I cannot, honor forbids, it would unman me. I need all my strength."

Then he turned to Izetta, avoiding her clear, calm eyes as he spoke.

"Please leave me to myself awhile. I must have time to consider."

With a haughty bow she turned from him.

"I have one favor to ask," he said, "will you send our little child to me here?"

"No; a thousand times no!" cried Izetta, passionately; "the father who could spurn from him the wronged wife and mother, shall not look upon the innocent face of her child. I shall not enter your door again, nor break your bread. I am going to the home of Abel Moore, the flute-maker of Silvernook; send me word there what you intend to do."

She turned with the imperial grace of a queen; turned from the husband whom she so madly loved even yet, and glided swiftly down the lilac-bordered path in the moonlight out of their sight, leaving Ulmont Ulvesford and the mother of Loraine with a nameless anguish on their faces, gazing into each other's eyes under the star-spangled heavens as they listened to the merry laughter of Loraine as it floated out to them from the rose-bordered porch.

Loraine, or Izetta and her child.
God help him to choose between them!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SWISS OFFICERS.

ALL that long night Ulmont Ulvesford paced the library fighting with honor, love, truth, and loyalty, the fiercest battle mortal had ever been called upon to face.

There were no words to express the horror with which he gazed upon the bitter fruit of that fatal wooing; unconsciously he had blighted the lives of two women—one he loved with all his soul, sweet, trusting Loraine; the other was his wronged young wife, whom he had sworn to the dying to protect. How could he choose between them?

That night many a silver thread found its way into his fair, clustering hair. Twice Loraine had sent for him.

"Say I am busy with important letters, Zack," he said to the servant who delivered the message.

The man looked in wonder at the haggard face of his young master, as he closed the door softly after him.

Ulmont Ulvesford resumed his walk face to face with the horrible crime which shadowed his life. Again the servant tapped gently at the door.

"If you please, sir, Mrs. Ulvesford says her head aches, and she is waiting for you."

A sudden impulse swept over Ulmont to go to her; but he checked it quickly.

"No," he muttered; "there must be no wavering in the path of duty. Say I cannot come, I am very busy, she need not wait for me," he commanded, wearily; "do not disturb me again."

The man walked away wondering what had come over the young master.

Toward morning the library bell rang furiously.

"Zack," he said, "I want you to pack my valise and your own immediately; order the carriage to be in readiness at the door within half an hour. You have been a tried and trusted servant; I command you to let no one know of this matter: not even my wi—not even Mrs. Ulvesford."

"What, sir!" cried Zack, aghast, scarcely believing he had heard aright; "not even Mrs. Ulvesford?"

Ulmont turned away his face with a bitter groan.

"Sir," said the old servant, gravely, "I've been here long years—ay, sir, years before you were born, and I make bold this once to speak my mind. I have known every sorrow that has come upon the people of Ulvesford, but I do not know yours. I can see by your face it is no small

one; but I say this, sir, if you leave your young wife in this way, without one word, her heart will break. Master, do go to her; she was quite ill when I left her; her cheeks were flushed and her eyes burned like stars."

"Zack, Zack," cried Ulmont, distractedly; "you must not tempt me too! I must act like a man of honor. I have never flinched from a terrible ordeal—I must not now. You and I are going away, Zack; I am driven from here by a terrible crime. I cannot tell you more. Pack the valises quickly, bring the carriage around by the park gate; let me know at once when all is in readiness.

The preparations were soon completed.

Ulmont Ulvesford leaned his head wearily against the mantel, gazing round the room for the last time.

"Better Loraine should learn to despise me," he sighed. "than sully for one instant her spotless honor."

He dared not think of Izetta.

"No, no—I must leave home at once and forever. I shall never look upon their faces more."

A great yearning came over him to see his child, but the thought he put quickly from him.

He heard the trampling of feet on the thick carpets of Loraine's apartments overhead, yet he quite forgot to think it an unusual occurrence at the dead of night.

His overcoat lay on his arm and his valise at his feet; he was impatient at the unaccountable delay; he had intended to be far away from Boston when daylight overtook him.

The carriage stood in waiting at the park gate. Zack had scarcely stored his luggage under the seat when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a foreign voice asked:

"Is this Ulvesford Place?"

Too astounded to speak, Zack nodded his head.

"Is your master within?"

"Why, of course," answered Zack; "where else would he be at this time of night?"

There were two cloaked strangers. Zack saw a strange smile pass between them.

"There is some mystery here," said the stranger, indicating the carriage.

"Not that I know of," answered Zack, tartly.

"Perhaps it is the custom of the country then to have a carriage standing at a gentleman's gate, ready for use, after midnight, eh?"

"I reckon my master knows his own business," retorted Zack.

Again he noticed the same strange smile pass between the strangers.

"Mr. Ulvesford anticipates a trip abroad?" asked one of them interrogatively.

"I say it's none of your affairs," said Zack, irascibly; "if anybody asks you, just you tell them you don't know."

"Not so fast, my good man," interposed the stranger: "supposing I do know?"

"Eh!" said Zack, surprisedly.

"My business here to-night is to tell your master he need not go."

Zack dropped the whip he held in his hand in utter amazement.

"You don't say so!" he ejaculated.

"Yes," responded the stranger; "you have noticed your master is greatly worried of late, have you not?"

"Oh, Lord bless you, yes, sir; he's clean broke up."

"Exactly," chuckled the man softly, rubbing the palms of his hands together; "I have come to lift that trouble from your master's mind, my good man. I want you to lead the way to where your master is waiting, if you please; my friend and I will follow."

"I will go and announce you first."

"Quite unnecessary; it will be all right, my good man, your master is expecting us; time is valuable."

Still Zack was not wholly satisfied; he had strange misgivings. No thought of the terrible consequences came to faithful old Zack as he answered, bowing low before them:

"If that is the case, gentlemen, I will conduct you to him at once."

He led the way down the long graveled walks and through the dim, wide corridors, their footfalls making no sound on the velvet carpet.

They reached the library door. Zack threw it open wide with a low bow.

Ulmont Ulvesford, his traveling duster and rug thrown over his arm, his valise at his feet, still leaned his head upon his arm, against the mantel; he did not even raise his head as the door opened.

"If you please, master," said Zack, "two gentlemen——"

"Never mind formalities, my good man," interrupted the spokesman of the two, stepping forward, "allow us to present ourselves."

Their cloaks slipped from their shoulders,

"Swiss officers who bear the extradition papers wherein Ulmont Ulvesford was wanted in Savoy for the murder of one Heath Hampton in the Alpine Mountains!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LORAINE.

"I AM sorry we have interrupted your flight to climes more cogenial," said the officer, stepping forward; "we must do our duty—you are our prisoner, sir."

Then, and not until then, did the heroic bravery of the noble young heir clearly manifest itself.

"Gentlemen," he said calmly, "I am not guilty of the charge you bring against me; 'tis true, a duel was fought between Heath Hampton and myself, but I swear to you I left him with but a mere scratch on his right hand."

"That is not for *us* to judge," answered the officers, doggedly.

At that moment the door was flung open, and Mrs. Lorrimer, her eyes red and swollen with weeping, swiftly entered the room.

She saw the officers in their strange foreign dress and Ulmont in his traveling garb standing between them.

"Ulmont," she whispered, pointing to the officers, "what do they wish here?"

Ulmont was frightened at the terrible calmness of her voice.

"What do they wish? answer me," she commanded.

Slowly the officer stepped forward.

"He is wanted in Switzerland: madam; we are come to escort him thither."

They all read the terrible question in her eyes, and they pitied the proud, white-haired lady before them, as they continued in a low voice:

"For the murder of one Heath Hampton in a duel."

"My God!" cried the mother, the tears rolling down her furrowed cheeks; "and in the room above his wife, my only child, lies dying! Oh, Ulmont!" she wailed, "tell me this new sorrow is not true; I cannot bear much more; my cup of grief is already full."

No word issued from Ulmont Ulvesford's white, set lips.

"Come, sir," said the officers hurriedly, "we must be off."

"Gentlemen," she whispered, stepping nearer them, "in yonder room his young wife lies ill—I say she is dying—he must come to her at once. She will not die if she but looks upon his face before it is too late."

"No," said the officers, sternly, "we are sorry to disoblige you, madam, but delays are dangerous; we must refuse you."

"If you are human," she cried, "listen to me; he *must* see her. She has called for long hours upon his name, yet

he came not; she has worked herself up into a high fever —if she looks upon his face and rests her golden head upon his breast, she will drop into peaceful slumber like a little child; if he comes not the fire of her weary watching must soon consume her; for the sake of your own wives, mothers, and daughters, grant my prayer."

Something very like a tear glistened in both officers' eyes.

"See, the morning is breaking swiftly—we must be far from here ere the sun has risen; still we cannot refuse the young gentleman a few moments—in our presence—with his wife. Lead the way, madam."

Silently the officers stationed themselves unobserved behind the hanging draperies, while Ulmont, followed by the sorrowing mother, quickly approached the couch upon which Loraine reclined.

They heard a glad cry: "Ulmont, my darling," and two white arms were flung round Ulmont's neck.

"What have I done that has displeased you, dear?" whispered Loraine; "you could not have stayed away from me so cruelly if it were not so. Why did you not come hours ago, love?"

Ulmont's heart was full; he only shook his head, clasping the lovely form he was so soon to leave madly to his wildly beating heart; in that moment he quite forgot she was not his wife.

"I have had such horrid dreams, love," she sighed, "but they are all gone now that I have you with me again."

"You would not like to lose me, Loraine?" he asked, in a voice terribly calm.

The clasp of the white arms tightened about his neck.

"Do not say such frightful words, Ulmont. I cannot bear such thoughts, dear; you most not try my heart so cruelly."

Ulmont could scarcely repress a groan that rose to his lips.

"I want you to clasp your arms closely about me, Ulmont," she said, with a smile on her innocent face, "and tell me how truly you love me. I want you to whisper: 'I love you dearly, my wife.'"

Ulmont's heart was nearly broken; he was but human, and his suffering was growing beyond human endurance, as he whispered every tender word of his pent-up love, clasping her madly to his breast, knowing it was for the last time while they both lived.

"Thank you, dear," she said, "if you had come to me long hours ago it might have been different. I feel, Ul-

mont, as if I were slowly drifting away from you; ere the sun rises in the eastern sky you may have no Loraine."

A gradual whiteness had stolen over the beautiful flower-like face, whose life was like a sensitive plant; the first chilling blight that had come upon her, had struck like a keen blast to her heart.

"You see, Ulmont," she smiled, "I could not endure even a few brief hours out of your presence."

The fountain of the mother's tears was dry.

Ulmont Ulvesford, strong man though he was, flung himself on his knees beside the couch and wept like a child.

When the doctor had been called, he said:

"If there is one power above all others that can save her, it is her husband's presence; if that fails her she is lost to us."

"Ulmont," she whispered, "such long, dark shadows seem stealing around me; clasp my hands tightly or I may slip from your grasp."

Suddenly the blue eyes flashed brightly open, gazing around upon the little group.

"Where is Izetta," she asked, softly; "that she is not here?"

Mother and husband's eyes met in a horrified glance.

"Tell Izetta I want her here at once," she said, with sudden energy.

How could they answer her?

"Mother," she said, "you will bring Izetta to me; she can sooth me with her sweet, sad voice, like tolling bells. Bring her here; do not refuse me, mother."

Again that agonized gaze passed between Ulmont and Loraine's mother.

"Do not refuse her," whispered the doctor, "if it be possible; her very life hangs on the fulfillment of her wishes."

Slowly the mother turned and quitted the room.

An hour afterward a light, swift step was heard in the corridor, and Izetta, quite alone, entered the room. A beautiful smile flitted around the sweet mouth of the golden-haired girl lying against Ulmont Ulvesford's shoulder.

"I knew you would come to me, Izetta," she said, holding out her white hands to her; "come nearer," she whispered, "I can hardly see your face."

Again, with averted faces, the tortured young wife and husband met, bending over the fair golden-haired girl between them.

The officers, screened by the silken curtains, turned away their heads; they could not break in upon so solemn a scene.

The gray clouds broke in the sky, the slanting rays of the morning sunshine bathed in a flood of crimson and gold the stony, agonized face of Ulmont Ulvesford and the unearthly beauty of the pallid face against his breast, and fell on the beautiful, dark, glossy head of Izetta kneeling by the couch, her face buried in the pillow, the white-haired mother watching the face of her only child in an agony too deep for words.

Slowly Loraine's lips moved.

"Ulmont," she said, "hold me closer."

The strong arms tightened about her.

"Izetta, are you here?"

The pressure of Izetta's hand reassured her.

"I am going to ask a favor of you, Ulmont, and of you, Izetta, a last request. I am dying, love, don't weep so. God has called me; if, after I am gone, Ulmont, dear, you can love Izetta for my sake, promise me, she and mother shall hold the place I am leaving vacant in your heart."

A terrible groan escaped Ulmont's lips, wrung from the very depths of his tortured soul by the innocent words of hapless Loraine.

"Promise me, Ulmont," she whispered.

Izetta turned her quivering face away, and the mother hurriedly quit the room; she could not endure the cruel stab each word had cost her.

"I love you both," whispered Loraine; "promise me, Ulmont, if another is ever brought to this dear old home I have loved so well, 'twill be Izetta; I love her next to you and mother."

Slowly Loraine clasped their hands together, the hand of Ulmont and Izetta, holding them clasped tightly within her own.

"Promise," she whispered, faintly.

For one brief instant Ulmont raised his troubled head and gazed upon Izetta's face; deep sobs convulsed his frame.

"I promise, dear," he whispered, sorely grieved.

Loraine's hands still clasped theirs, even while the shadow of death crept over her.

"It is hard to die so young, Ulmont, dear," she sighed. "When they ask you how I lived and why I died so young, tell them my life was like the sunshine and the flowers—short but very sweet.

"No sorrow ever came to me; it is hard to die so young and leave you, Ulmont, dear, but I whisper to my God, 'Thou knowest.'"

"You will love Izetta's little child," she whispered, "and remember, when you speak his name, it was your lost Lo-

raine who gave it him; because it was my husband's name I loved its melodious music."

Ulmont bowed his head and wept.

"Ulmont, love—mother," these were the last words Loraine Ulvesford ever uttered; the white hands that clasped those two so closely relaxed their hold.

In all the glow of her fair, young beauty, she was dead.

There had been no pain; she had died like the blossoms, scarcely without warning.

And the golden sunlight drifting in through the half-closed windows, fell upon Loraine's bright, waving hair, lighting a golden halo round it like a crown—such a crown as angels wear in Heaven.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LONG YEARS—PERHAPS FOREVER.

THE officers stepped forth from their concealment; it was the hardest duty they had ever performed to unclasp Ulmont's arms from the beautiful, waxen form.

"I cannot go yet," he gasped.

They pointed to the white, smiling, peaceful face.

"See, it is all over," they said: "you must come."

They unclasp his arms, and lay all that was mortal of sweet Loraine back on the pillow.

"I will give my heritage," he cried, "if I may stay until the last sad rites are over."

They shook their heads; stern duty called them.

"No, not another hour," they said.

"Izetta," said Ulmont, it was the first time he had voluntarily addressed her, as they still stood with averted faces at Loraine's bedside; "I am forced from Loraine's grave by the stern decree of the law. Nearly a year ago in Switzerland I fought a duel. I never dreamed I had struck my adversary fatally. I saw but a slight wound on his right hand. They tell me he is dead, and I am accused of—his murder."

He held up his hand as she was about to speak.

"It was for the honor of my name," he said, "more I cannot tell you. I shall sign my entire estate over to you before I leave America. I shall pay for my folly with my life. In the after years, when you tell our boy of his unhappy father, tell him, God knows I never intended injuring his innocent mother; tell him that Izetta, and say a web of fate wove me in its meshes, from which my death alone can extricate me; one thing more, Izetta: 'twould grieve me to know that the sad story of Loraine, in after time, would be given to the world. Our boy shall inherit all; but, Izetta, as you value poor Loraine's memory, I

ask you to keep the terrible tragedy of her young, guileless life, which she never knew herself, forever locked in your own breast. Forgive me, Izetta, for the past—I ask it for Loraine's sake and little Ulmont's."

Izetta held out her hands for answer, she could not speak, so great was her emotion.

"Come, sir," urged the officers, "you must come."

"One word more. Always remember, Izetta—I say it in the solemn presence of Loraine—my sword but barely touched Heath Hampton's hand nine months ago. I am not his murderer!"

"Did you say he is accused of the murder of Heath Hampton in Switzerland, nine months ago?" cried Izetta, springing eagerly toward the officers. "Then it is false—all false, I say. I saw Heath Hampton, alive and well, but four months since; there was a deep scar on his hand, but otherwise he was uninjured," she cried, vehemently.

There was something in the commanding tone of this beautiful girl that awed them.

The officers gazed at her in dismay; it had been proven beyond a doubt that he lay crushed into an unrecognizable mass at the foot of the Alpine Mountains. She was surely mad.

"It is as true as Heaven," cried Izetta, solemnly.

At that moment they observed a throng of people gathering on the river bank which skirted Ulvesford Park. Both officers could not leave their prisoner, so one hurried forth to learn the cause of the disturbance; the other stood guard with Ulmont at the window.

The throng made way for the strange officer in the foreign dress.

"What is this?" he asked of them.

They pointed to two men who lay tightly clasped in each other's arms—a box of gold clutched between them, washed up by the tide. There was a sudden commotion among the crowd.

"Step back!" they cried; "make way for the mother of Heath Hampton," as, with slow, feeble steps she advanced to the spot.

"This is the end of all my hopes. "Oh, my sons!" she cried, "my sons!"

Those who had known those two in life, looked upon her in wonder, but she did not heed them.

"Yes, they are both my sons," she cried. "I despised the one for his deformity, and loved the other for his beauty. I abandoned the one in his infancy that the other might inherit all. My sin has recoiled upon my own head."

She clasped both damp forms to her heart, putting back

the clustering hair from their foreheads; then her head fell on her breast—she had followed her two sons through the dark, shadowy valley of death.

Someone suddenly stepped forward and gazed a moment at the handsome, cruel, mocking face of Heath Hampton.

"Ah, Amy," muttered Abel Moore, the flute-maker, as he hastily and mercifully threw a cloak about them, shutting them out from the curious gaze of the throng, "at last your wrongs are avenged."

No one ever inquired how they had met, or where. The box with the gold clutched between them told its own story.

The identity of Heath Hampton was proven then and there beyond a doubt. It was a strange story which the brother officer related to his companion.

"Well," replied the chief, "it seems then as if the party came to his death months later by drowning, not by the hand of Ulmont Ulvesford, on Swiss soil."

He drew the papers from his breast pocket.

"These are useless now, sir," he said, handing them to Ulmont; "we shall sail immediately on the *White Cresson* without you."

Ulmont was so astounded at the complicating events transpiring around him, that he hardly realized what they said.

"We honorably discharge you from custody; our mission is ended. We hope you will pardon the cruel duty of officers in thus intruding upon your sorrowful privacy."

They held out their hands to him. In another moment they were gone. Ulmont could scarcely realize that he was a free man. He was thankful Loraine had never known the slightest shadow of the deep woes that had hung over her.

He knelt at the couch of Loraine, his head upon her mother's shoulder, refusing to be comforted.

That was a funeral never to be forgotten. It was a pitiful sight to see the same group of sorrowful maidens that had held white roses at her wedding, place snowy flowers on her tomb.

She was so beautiful even in death, so fair, so young to die.

Young girls looked upon her smiling, marble face, with tear-stained eyes, while mothers, with a shudder, clasped their own darlings closer to their breasts.

For many a long year after they told of the beautiful, golden-haired young wife, who was so young and fair to die.

They told, too, of the broken-hearted husband who followed the sad procession to the grave one bright, May

morning, and of the white-haired, feeble mother who had lost her all, whose bitterest sorrow had fallen upon her in her old age, and they told of a dark-eyed stranger who wiped away that mother's tears and comforted her, how she held her in her arms when the world grew dark around her, drew the weary, white head upon her strong, young breast and comforted her with hopeful, loving words that brought tears to every eye.

Even strangers cried:

"God bless her for the comfort she has brought this grief-stricken mother."

It was all over.

"Izetta," Ulmont said, sadly, "I am going away—going abroad for the present. Ulvesford Mansion haunts me. Will you stay here with our child until I return?"

He turned away abruptly.

"Send at once for Abel Moore and his good old wife, that you may not live here alone, now that Loraine's mother has returned to Lorrimer Hall. Do not teach my child to think unkindly of me, Izetta," he added, holding out his hands, "always let him think of me at my best."

Silently Izetta placed her hands in his—the husband who had been separated from her by such strange webs of cruel fate.

Ulmont held them for a moment only, dropped them suddenly, and was gone.

The same day that fair, golden-haired Loraine was laid to rest under the drooping willows Ulmont Ulvesford left America, to be gone long years—perhaps forever.

CHAPTER XL.

"MY WIFE AND MY CHILD."

Two years later, one beautiful morning in midsummer, Izetta Ross—as she was still called—stood at one of the lace-draped windows of Ulvesford Mansion, gazing out into the brilliant sunshine.

Fragrant crimson roses climbed riotously against the casement, kissing Izetta's soft cheeks and dark, glossy curls at every breath of the gentle breeze.

The balmy air was redolent of the aroma of blossoms, while little crimson-breasted birds, swaying on the maple boughs and on the rippling fountain's brim, were pouring their very hearts out in thrilling, joyous song.

It was not of these Izetta was thinking; her large, dark eyes, fringed by their silken lashes, dreamily sought the distan hills; her beautiful, proud, sweet lips were parted in a smile,

"Ulmont, my husband! Ah, Ulmont Ulvesford, where art thou now?" she murmured, half aloud.

"Did 'oo call, mamma?" chirped a little voice, sweet as a robin's, and a wee, dainty-dimpled little darling, in white lace and soft, pink ribbons, bounded into her arms.

"No, Ulmont, my darling," she answered, clasping him so closely in her arms that the roses she wore on her breast fell in a shower on the child's rosy cheeks; "mamma did not call you; go and play with the butterflies and the flowers; mamma will watch you from the window."

"'Es, 'oo did call me," persisted the child, tossing his little curly head and pouting his sweet, red mouth that was only made for kisses, and opening wide a pair of dark, velvety eyes; "'oo said, 'Ulmont, Uly, where is 'oo now?'"

Izetta blushed rosy red.

"I meant your papa, sweet," she said.

"The papa in 'ee pic-cer in 'ee uzzer room?" lisped the child, "'at makes 'oo cry so when 'oo sees it?"

"Yes, dear," said Izetta, hesitatingly; "you must look at that picture every day, Ulmont, and you must learn to love him very much."

"Does 'oo love him, mamma?"

"Yes," she answered, "very much."

"Does 'oo wish he would 'turn home, mamma?"

"Oh, yes, very much, my pet," answered Izetta, caressing the beautiful face raised to her own.

A shadow fell between Izetta and the brilliant sunshine; she wondered why her heart was thrilling with such ecstatic delight.

"Izetta—my wife! Ulmont—my baby!" cried a deep, thrilling voice, with the happiest cry that ever was heard.

The beautiful, queenly girl turned her head, the child still clasped in her arms.

A tall manly form stood before her; she glanced into the eloquent, pleading face; she heard the low, tremulous voice cry:

"I have come to claim my wife and my child!"

The strong arms were outstretched in another instant, and Izetta and her child were folded to Ulmont Ulvesford's breast.

He drew his wife to a sofa, seating himself beside her, his arms still encircling her slender waist, while little Ulmont, chirping like a robin on his breast, was stealing half of mamma's kisses.

"Izetta," whispered Ulmont, raising the blushing face of his lovely girl-wife to his own, and gazing down into her dark eyes, "I must whisper a secret to you, darling. I am madly, passionately in love—for the first time—with my own lovely wife. Without your love, Izetta, the world

would be a blank to me; forget the past; we will live only in the future, in which I shall have but one great aim, 'the hope of winning my wife's love.' See! I have little Ulmont's already. Will you try to love me, too, dear, for little Ulmont's sake."

Izetta glanced shyly up into the one noble face in all the wide world she had loved so truly and so well, as she whispered:

"You have not to try to win my love, Ulmont, my husband; that you have already, not for little Ulmont's sake, but for your own!"

Ulmont Ulvesford kissed her rosy mouth bashfully, joyously, like a lover. That was the most supremely happy moment either of them had ever experienced. Izetta knew she had won her way to her husband's heart at last.

That night there was a quiet wedding at Ulvesford Mansion to appease the curiosity of the outside world, who never dreamed of the strange drama that had been enacted by those two lives so ruthlessly torn asunder by the hand of fate.

* * * * * * *

Some five years later the dancing summer sunshine fell across a pathway, powdered on either side with jessamine and sweet mignonette, up which a lady and gentleman walked. Two children gamboled on before, and dropped white roses, which they carried, on a mossy grave.

"Ulmont," called the mother, gently, "take the roses from little Loraine's hands, and place them with your own."

"Let me put my own roses on the pretty lady's grave," cried golden-haired Loraine.

The children knelt beside a grassy mound, while the father and mother, with their arms about each other, reverentially bowed their heads.

Beneath a drooping willow, where the whispering summer winds love to linger, and the birds trill forth their sweetest notes, stands a tall, white, marble shaft pointing heavenward, and as the golden sunshine falls lovingly athwart it they read the inscription which it bears:

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY OF
LORAINE,
BELOVED WIFE OF
ULMONT ULVESFORD,
Aged 18 Years.
"*Thou Knowest.*"

No one but those two standing there, and God, save the feeble, white-haired mother, who spent many a lonely hour with her face pressed close against the cold, white marble, and her arms twined around it, not even she, who slept beneath the daisies, knew of the great tragedy that had spread its dark wings over her bright, young life.

The careless, curious world never knew.

The secred of that "Fatal Wooing" was buried with her.

"Fair Loraine," murmurs Izetta, her gentle tears falling on the daisies, and the soft, green grass.

"Heaven knows I loved her who slumbers here with a love that might have been my doom," murmurs Ulmont; "but after all, Izetta, when God called her He knew best; now all the love of my manhood is centered in my second love, and purified by sufferings, a love that will last through eternity!"

Izetta's head droops upon Ulmont's breast; their little children, Ulmont and golden-haired Loraine, flit close to their mother's side.

Izetta clasps her darlings in her arms, while Ulmont gazes proudly on his treasures.

Perhaps the father's gaze lingers longest on his handsome, noble son, who will one day bear his name and fortune proudly.

The smiling heavens bend over them, the ripple of the brooklet and the song the birds sing to the flowers are of their wondrous love.

No sound breaks upon the harmony of those reunited lives, whispering of what might have happened through the youthful folly of that "Fatal Wooing."

[THE END.]

AFTER LONG YEARS.

A PORTSMOUTH STORY.

By CLEMENT MARSLAND.

PART I.

On a certain afternoon at the beginning of this century, the town of Portsmouth was all astir. Men and women were standing in groups, talking and gesticulating in an excited manner; wagons and drays were passing in long lines to and from the harbor; a sound of continuous labor came borne upon the air. Something unusual had happened. On the morning of that very day a rumor had spread abroad that Napoleon was preparing an armament to invade England: a sufficient cause for such visible anxiety.

An order had been given that the great ships lying at anchor in the roads were to be got ready and furnished with all the implements of war without a moment's delay. All the merchant sailors to be found in or out of the town were being seized by press-gangs for the service of His Most Gracious Majesty King George III.

Bands of blue-jackets with an officer at their head had been busily employed since morning searching all the lodging-houses and taverns throughout the town, and nearly every available hand had been taken before the evening. Numbers had also enlisted of their own accord, persuaded to it by the entreaties and prayers of mothers, wives, and sisters; for Francophobia was the order of the day. Napoleon Bonaparte, commonly known as "Bony," had come upon the English nation as a terrible nightmare, a fearful demon that had turned his evil eye on Albion's happy shores; against whom a nation's strength, and that the British nation, could scarce hope to contend.

Over the outlying parts of the town a peaceful stillness prevailed, broken only by a distant murmur of sound borne thither on the breeze. Few people were about, every

one having hied harbor-wards to hear the latest reports, and to watch the business of preparation.

Standing back from one of the roads leading out toward the country, was a pretty white-washed cottage. It had a small garden in front, bright with hollyhocks and sunflowers, and fenced in by green palings. Over the white front of the house was carefully-trained jessamine and climbing roses.

In the garden was a girl. She was standing with one hand resting on the little green gate, looking with dreamy gray eyes toward the town, which was bathed in the soft crimson rays of the setting sun. A gentle breeze from the sea played among her fair hair, which scaping from under her white cap, fell in silken waves over her forehead; over the cap, and concealing all except the white frill, was a straw bonnet, with pale-blue ribbons tied beneath the chin. Her dress was of white muslin, with a pattern of pale-yellow flowers, made in the pretty short-waisted style of the time. A pair of long black mittens and a satchel completed her dress. She was like the original of one of Mr. Boughton's pictures. Thus she stood, lost in a day-dream.

"Musing, Mistress Margery?" asked a voice close to her.

She started back. The speaker was a short, dark man; he might have been called handsome as far as his actual features went, but his whole appearance was tainted with an expression so sinister that his natural beauty lost all charm and became actually repellant. He had come silently along the road in the opposite direction to that in which Margery had been looking.

"There is nothing to be afraid of in me, is there?" he said, observing her action; "I'm a friend, ain't I?"

"I suppose so—I hope so, but I don't know," she answered, retreating a pace further.

"I don't see what right you've got to doubt it. Any friend of Carey's must be your friend too, mustn't he, eh? I'm a friend of Jack Carey's, you know."

"So you say," Margery replied, "and I can't disbelieve you."

"Of course not. Well you know, you ought to behave handsome to your friends now. You oughtn't to have any unfriendly feelings to any one now, least of all to me. Why, you are a lucky girl. Going to be married to-morrow to Jack Carey, the pet of the service, officers and men. You ought to thank your stars, or rather me, for coming across such a chap. He's been doing splendidly. Ah, I have a piece of news about him—like to hear it?"

"Oh, please tell me anything about Jack, Mr. Redbank," cried Margery, her look brightening, and coming nearer.

"Now, why can't you call me Roger, like a sensible girl, and not Mr. Redbank? It ain't friendly of you."

"Well, will you tell me, please—Roger?"

"Now, that's better. I do like to hear you call me Roger; you do it so pretty. Do it again, will you?"

"Certainly not," replied Margery, with a red flush on her cheek.

"Oh, don't if you don't wish to. I only thought it would show you was friendly, that's all. But I don't think I'll tell you the news. You would much rather have it from his own dear lips, wouldn't you, eh?" and Roger gave a short, sharp laugh.

"No, no. Please tell me, Mr.—— I mean Roger," implored the girl.

"Well, since you ask me so nice, I will. He's been specially recommended for promotion by his superior officer, all on account of his admirable conduct. There!"

"Oh, that does make me so happy! Is he promoted yet?"

"No; he ain't promoted yet, nor likely to be for some time. You know, Margery, such a recommendation don't necessarily mean more pay. We poor fellows in the service don't see too much of 'the ready,' you know."

"You don't suppose I care for that, does you?" said Margery. "If Jack is poor, I shall be poor too, that is all. I care for nothing but him, and him for himself, and not for what he is worth as a commercial speculation."

"Your sentiments does you honor, my lady," remarked Roger, with a faintly perceptible sneer. "But, after all, you can't live on love, you know. Money does count for something. It makes a smooth road for love to travel by. But as you seem determined to marry him," he added. "it ain't no use saying anything, I suppose.

"If marrying him meant ruin to myself, I'd do it." Margery spoke with a determined voice.

"Good again. But I think, you know," Roger continued, "that you don't consult your own comfort much. It'll be very hard for you to have to live alone on almost nothing, when he's away at sea—very hard, indeed. I dare say you'll think some day that it's a pity you didn't have me instead of him after all."

"Sir!"

"Now don't burst out like that; I ain't saying nothing. Only—— look here." Roger Redbank unbuttoned his coat, and from the inside pocket drew out two canvas bags, tightly tied at the mouth.

"Hark at that!" he said, letting them swing lightly against the palings. "Gold pieces, every one of 'em!"

Margery drew back, with an expression of anger on her pale face.

"Do you think to tempt me from my love with your miserly money-bags? You do not know Margery Seaton if you think that. Put that back again directly; and never speak to me again like that."

"Oh, I didn't mean anything," replied Roger, replacing the bags. "I never thought of tempting you, bless me! I only meant to show that I might have done something toward making you happy, if you'd done the same for me. That was all."

"You seem certain that money is happiness to man. Take care that it is not the opposite for you, and prove your misery!" Margery walked toward the cottage.

"Well, good-night, Miss Margery, as you seem to be tired of my company. I want to say something first, though; come here."

"What is it?" she asked, in a voice betraying no interest.

"I was going to advise you to tell Jack Carey to keep clear of the press-gangs to-night, because they'll be very busy. That's all. Don't take my advice if you don't like it; only remember, I give it to you gratis, just to show I leave friendly-like."

"Thank you very much," answered the girl, relaxing her former cold tone of voice. "It's very kind of you to give it. I shall certainly take it. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Roger, and turning away he took a path leading across the downs toward the setting sun. "Very good, my fine lady. We'll see," he muttered to himself as he strode away.

The girl watched his retreating figure standing out clearly defined against the opal background of the western sky, then as it disappeared behind a ridge of rising ground, she breathed a sigh of relief, and turned once more towards the town, now scarcely discernible in the twilight.

Before many minutes had elapsed a quick step was heard coming along the road in the direction of the town. Margery pushed open the little green gate and stood in the road in an attitude of happy expectancy. In another minute the figure of a man appeared, suddenly taking form out of the gray of twilight.

"Jack!"

"Margery!"

"I am so glad you have come, Jack," said Margery, as he stooped to kiss her tenderly. "I have been waiting for you, oh! such a long, long while."

"Dear little girl!" said Jack, almost beneath his breath. "But now I am here and have such a piece of news to tell you. Can you guess what it is?"

"I think I can. Roger Redbank was here just now and told me some good news about you. I expect it is the same."

"Roger Redbank? How did he know? And what was he doing here talking to you?"

"He often comes and talks to me," replied Margery. "I wish he wouldn't. I don't like him, and yet I can't say why. He always speaks well of you, and insists on the fact of being your best friend."

"So he tells me, three or four times a day. I don't care to hear it so often. Margery, there is something about that man that I, too, don't like. Don't talk to him; he means no good."

"I don't more than I can help; but if he speaks to me, what am I to do?"

"Answer him as shortly as possible, and show him that you don't want him. But let's talk of something else; he is not a pleasant subject." Jack drew Margery to him. "Margery, I wonder if you are as happy as I am when I think of to-morrow. I can hardly bring myself to believe that you will be mine—forever."

"Jack, Jack, I pray Heaven that it may be so, but—oh! I don't know why, I know no reason, and yet—I am afraid when I think of it. Do not ask me the cause: I know of none, but—I fear."

"Margery, you ought not to fear," replied Jack in clear, steady tones. "We must trust in God. He it is who guides us. How often has He watched over me in storm and hurricane, battle and shipwreck! At such times, when each moment was as my last, I have known that you were praying for me, and that He heard your prayer. Margery, you should not fear now."

Margery gazed up at his earnest, trustful face when he had finished speaking, her soft gray eyes bright with happy tears. Then—

"Jack, I have no fear now," she said.

Two hours have passed. The tones of a distant clock striking eleven float softly through the night air. Jack and Margery have been talking the while. Ask not of what: there are some things "too sacred and too sweet for words." And now they must part.

"Margery," says Jack, softly, "sing me once again that dear old song. I love it well for itself, and from your lips it is for me as a hymn from another world."

Margery began, and her clear, sweet voice filled with soft melody the breeze.

"Blow softly, breeze, across the seas,
Thine angry passions stay;
And calm, O deep, thy wrath in sleep—
My love has gone away.

"Blow freshly, gales, and fill his sails
And waft him o'er the main;
His ship, O wave, from danger save—
My love, come back again."

The air was such an one as our grandfathers loved; simple and plaintive, a true melody with nothing that was forced or unnatural in it. Margery ceased.

"I shall never forget that song till I die," said Jack. "When I am away from you on my voyages, it will ring forever in my heart, and I shall think of the sweet voice that sang it."

A pause followed. Then—

"Good-bye!"

"God bless you, dear. Good-bye—till to-morrow."

And Margery tripped lightly into the house. Jack Carey passed through the gate and started at a brisk pace down the road toward Portsmouth. Soon, however, he slackened his walk, and with eyes on the ground, moved on silently, lost in happy meditation and oblivious to all around him. In this manner he neared the town. He was passing some broken ground a short distance outside, when a sharp sound like a whistle through the teeth caught his ear, then close behind him a whisper, "That's him," then a rush of footsteps. He turned sharply round and found himself face to face with five men; at some little distance he thought he discerned a sixth vanishing in the darkness.

"What do you want?" he said.

Without making answer four of the men seized him. He struggled violently to free himself. He was a strong man, and they had no slight difficulty in holding him.

"Let me go," shouted Jack, "or it will be the worse for some of you!"

Then the fifth man, who seemed to be in command, cried, in clear tones, "In the name of His Gracious Majesty King George!"

"Ah! the press-gang!" he cried, in a hoarse voice. He ceased struggling; then turning his face to heaven, he murmured softly, "Thy will be done!"

PART II.

TEN years have passed. England, and indeed the whole of Europe, has been freed of a nightmare. Statesmen

breathe more freely; merchants open their coffers, and "cast their bread upon the waters;" soldiers exhibit their medals and their scars with equal pride; sailors spend their pay like millionaires; the world is light-hearted. And why? It is the autumn of the year 1815: St. Helena now holds the "Ogre of Corsica."

But this light-heartedness is not quite universal; there are some heavy hearts throughout England. Mothers mourn for children, wives for husbands, maids for sweethearts.

In Portsmouth town great anxiety prevails; for the lists of killed and missing are often found to be not faultless.

It is a cold gusty day, and night has already begun to close in before its time; yet the quays are crowded with men and women, standing silent with anxious eyes turned seawards. They stand there seemingly unconscious of cold and damp, except that from time to time one walks briskly backward and forward, with hands buried deep in pockets, stamping somewhat heavily on the wet slippery stones.

A ship has come to anchor in the roads; and they are waiting for the boats which are bringing off the men. The first one arrives: an eager rush is made to the landing-place. Then there is a sound of heart-felt welcomes and embraces, and many a prayer of thanks rises to heaven; but others turn back with a cold chill in their hearts, and stand and wait once more.

Two hours have passed in this manner; the last boat has left the ship's side. In it were twelve men; all were laughing and talking except one, and he sat silent in the stern-sheets, and scarcely raised his eyes toward the land. He was a powerful man, of some thirty-two years of age. His face was handsome though weather-beaten, and marked with lines of care, and there was a look of sadness in his keen gray eyes. A thick beard and mustache concealed his mouth and chin.

"Well, Carey," said one of his companions, "you don't seem to be very happy to get back to old Portsmouth again. What's the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing; only I haven't seen the old place for ten years and more, and it brings back old recollections."

"Aha!" replied another, laughing, "I believe you're afraid your sweetheart hasn't remained true for such a long time. You've got one, I suppose?"

"I had a sweetheart, and she remained true to me."

"Well, where is she now?"

"In Portsmouth."

"Of course we know that. But in what part is she?"

All the rest of the men were laughing at Carey's solemnity.

"In the church-yard," he answered.

The smile faded from their faces. They were silent for a few minutes, and nothing was heard but the steady plash of the oars, as the boat sped landwards. Then the conversation began again, but it was of other things. The honest, open-hearted fellows all felt for Jack Carey, and would not have grieved him for the world.

The boat reached the landing-place. The men sprang ashore nimbly, and each in turn was seized by eager hands, and submitted with good grace to the broadside of kisses he received from the women, and the mutilation his fingers underwent from the men.

Carey landed last; but there was none to welcome him. Some of his companions saw this, and in the fullness of their hearts tried to persuade him to "come along home with them." But he refused all on one pretext or another, knowing well how much happiness he would spoil. A stranger is always *de trop* at a family gathering. Jack Carey felt this very plainly, and knew that each who asked him, although the kindness he wished to show was sincere, experienced, nevertheless, a feeling of relief when the offered hospitality was refused. But he was not the less grateful to the good-hearted fellows.

So, wishing them all good-night, he wandered on into the town. The night had set in with a a cold drizzle; everything looked miserable and deserted; there were few loiterers in the street that night. Yet Carey wandered on with slow steps, lost in meditation, and heedless of the cold and damp. Arrived at a lamp which blinked with pale, sickly flame at the black night, he stopped, and drawing from his breast-pocket a crumpled letter, set himself to read it through for the hundredth time. These were the contents:

"DEAR CAREY:—I am sorry to have to be the one to break to you a sad bit of news; I had rather any one else had got to do it. It is about Margery Seaton. The poor girl was heart-broken when she heard of your misfortune in being seized by the press-gang, and began to mope from the day the ships sailed. She wasn't a bit like ordinary, but went about doing nothing, as if lost in a dream. This went on for some time, till we got the news of the battle of Trafalgar, and by some mistake (as we learnt afterward) your name appeared in the list of killed. When we broke the news to her (for we all believed it) she said nothing, but went on with her usual work.

"The next morning her body was taken up dead out of the harbor. She had drowned herself."

"My dear old friend, I wish there was somebody to find softer words in which to wrap up such hard facts, but the duty, has unfortunately, fallen to

"Your Friend,

"ROGER REDBANK."

When he had finished reading the letter, Carey folded it up carefully and returned it to his breast-pocket. He stood for a moment silent and motionless, then, heaving a heavy-drawn sigh, wandered on once more. He cared not whither his footsteps led him; his consciousness left their guidance to the memory, which, like a good pilot, steered him by channels which it had known years back, and recognized now.

His thoughts were sad, sad as the heavy, dank air about him, and broken by wild, fitful gusts of despair; yet there glimmered through the darkness, from time to time, faint wavering lights of hope. He would embrace death as a welcome friend; how often had he courted it openly, bravely, in the battle of man with the powers of man, and more than bravely in the battle of man with the powers of nature! and yet death came not. Self-murder! No; that was too horrible a thought. His whole nature revolted at it. He would trust himself to God's mercy, and do His will; He at least would care for him. A bright gleam this, flashing through the murky darkness of his soul. His mind was made up. He would visit her grave, just once, and hold commune with her spirit; for, surely, the spirits of the dead linger in such places as their bodies have known. Then he would find a ship, and roam the "watery ways," whither he knew not.

In the midst of such thoughts he became conscious, suddenly, of things around him. He was passing by an eating-house that he had known in former years. Hunger told him that it had been unsatisfied for many hours, and that here it desired to be appeased by meat and drink-offering. For hunger is a stern god, powerful to kill if unpropitiated.

Carey pushed open the door and passed in. The tables were divided from one another by screens, and he selected one which was empty, and in a retired corner. He ordered some food; he did not care what—whatever the waiter chose to give him.

There were many supping there, as he judged by the murmur of voices, and he soon discovered that some men, sailors by their talk, were in the next compartment, and with them a woman who spoke but little. Her voice produced in him a strange thrill; it was so long since he had heard an Englishwoman's voice, and it called up sad memories to his heart.

They were talking loudly enough for him to catch what they said, and having nothing else to do, he listened. Little harm, he thought, there could be in listening; it was a public room, and they would speak no secrets; even if they did, "dead men tell no tales," and he was dead to the world.

"Strange thing, though," said one of the men; "I can't see how it happened."

"Very simple," replied a second voice; "I tell you, he fell over."

"Fell over, yes, but why didn't he get into the boat again?"

"He never appeared above the water after he fell in. Sunk quite straight, just as if you'd thrown in a lump of lead. Couldn't swim, I suppose."

"Ah, but that's just it," returned the first speaker; "I knew him well—swam like a cork!"

"Well, I was there," said the other, "and saw it all. Look here, it was like this; when he got into the boat to come off to the ship he was drunk, dead drunk."

"Yes, yes," broke in the woman's voice, "he was when I last saw him, and said it was all my fault. God forgive him and me!"

"The wind was getting up gusty," continued the man's voice, "and the waves were chopping rather. Now, a man must be pretty steady at any time when it's like that. I had just thrown the rope, and he stood up in the boat to catch it. All of a sudden"—here the voice ceased, but it was evident that the description was being carried on in dumb show, then—"he was gone," it continued. "We waited till he reappeared, to hand him an oar, or throw a rope. He never did. They're dragging for him now."

There was silence for a moment; then a sound of woman's sobs was heard.

"Oh, if it has been in any way my fault, I shall never, never forgive myself, nor will others forgive me."

"Now, now! you mustn't take on like that, you know," said one of the men in a gentle voice. "You needn't blame yourself, and I'm sure no one will blame you. We all of us know how badly he has treated you these past years, trying to break in your will, and spreading stories about you. And we all honor you for being true to a man who was worth a thousand such as him. By the way, there's a report going about, which I'd like to tell you, only I don't dare in case it shouldn't be true. It's about him."

"Who?"

"Jack," replied the man.

Carey listened more attentively, and he was seized with

a strange trembling, although he knew that one out of every half-dozen of his shipmates was called Jack.

"Did he die bravely?" asked the woman.

"I can't say as he did, from what I've heard."

"What! do they say he died a coward? It's a lie, a base lie!"

"No, no; you mistake me. It's just what I want to explain. Some who've come home to-day were in the battle, you know, and they say——"

"What, what? quickly!"

"That he wasn't killed."

"Who says so? Who? Don't you know? Where can I find him? Tell me where to find him that I may question him. Not killed! Not dead! Oh, it is too much! Stop! answer me; you are not telling me a lie?"

"Lie! do you think I'd tell a lie to Margery Seaton?"

With a wild bound Carey sprang from his seat and stood, with face aghast and limbs trembling, at the entrance of the next compartment. His voice was hoarse and came with effort.

"Who is called by the name of Margery Seaton?"

The woman crouched terrified into the corner, and with lips white with emotion, said:

"I am Margery Seaton. Who are you that ask?"

"Jack Carey!"

"Ah!"

* * * * * * *

It was three days before Margery recovered consciousness. When she opened her eyes, after a deep sleep, she asked for Jack. He came to her. What words passed between them shall not be written; they are too sacred.

It was toward the evening that one of the men who had been with Margery came and asked to see her. He was admitted. When he entered he said:

"They have found him. Roger Redbank had two heavy bags of gold tied to his belt."

Carey was holding Margery's hand in his.

"God be merciful to him," he said, "as He has been merciful to us?"

[THE END.]

A MODERN CINDERELLA.

Not that she was so scandalously ill-used as the poor little heroine of the fairy tale that has delighted so many generations in their childhood, but the circumstances were not dissimilar, as you will see.

Violet Effingham had lived a very happy, unfettered life with her widowed father, the working partner of a prosperous firm in Birchin Lane, till she was twelve years old, when Mr. Effingham took to himself a second wife, partly with the idea that it would be better for his motherless girl to have some one who could better supply her lost parent's place than he, with his time so busily employed, could do; partly—it is to be feared—that he was fascinated by the full-blown charms of the widow whom he selected for that purpose, and whose earliest exercise of her delegated authority was to find out an eligible establishment for young ladies at Wimbledon, to which, despite her tears, Violet was forthwith sent.

She had been there a little over four years, tolerably contented with her life, after all, and always returning cheerfully enough after her holidays; but on one such occasion she discovered that her stepmother had issued invitations for a fancy dress ball, and actually wanted to pack her off to school again three days before the time on that account.

It need hardly be said that to be present at the ball was Violet's most ardent wish, and had her father been at home there is no doubt that a very small amount of coaxing on her part would have assured the consummation of her desire; but unfortunately Mr. Effingham was absent on business in the South of France, and, plead as she would, her stepmother was inexorable.

Not indeed that that lady was so remorseless a tyrant as the grim baroness of the fairy tale, but like her she was the mother of two grown-up daughters, so much grown up, indeed, that they felt it was high time they had homes of their own, and like the wicked step-sisters of Cinderella thought it would be quite as well to keep poor Violet in the background as long as possible—at any rate until they were settled.

Hinc illæ lacrymæ that flowed from Violet's pretty blue eyes as she in vain protested against her stepmother's decree.

"I am turned sixteen!" she cried, "and I was put into long-dresses last month, and I am sure papa would let me if he were here, and I will!"

She stood in the middle of the floor, with her fluffy golden hair falling over her eyes, her cheeks glowing a mild pink, and her whole *personnelle* indicative of resolve and determination in the extremest degree.

Mrs. Effingham looked at her in despair. The two Misses Smythson, Julia and Arabella, sat as stiff and prim as two carved marble images. "Violet's temper" was proverbial in the family, and these very proper and precisely behaved young women were wont to affect the greatest dismay at its vehement gusts.

"Violet," said Mrs. Effingham, solemnly, "in your dear papa's absence it is my duty to enforce his precepts, and carry out his discipline. You are a great deal too young to be introduced into society yet. You are to go back to boarding-school to-morrow."

"But!" cried Violet, in dismay, "my holidays do not expire until Wednesday!"

"That is very true," said Mrs. Effingham, compressing her thin lips to a mere slit; "consequently, you can see how far you have abridged your own period of recreation by your ungovernable will."

Violet, forgetting all about the sixteen years and the long dresses, burst into loud weeping.

"Pray, Violet, don't be so silly," said Julia.

"One would think," tartly spoke up Arabella, "that you were a child of ten years old. Of course, it is all for your own good——"

"My own fiddlesticks!" irreverently interrupted Violet, as she fled from the apartment in floods of undignified tears.

But numbers are certain to conquer in the long run; and so Violet was packed remorselessly off to boarding-school, and Mrs. Effingham's two girls returned to their consultations with the dressmaker.

Julia, a pallid blonde, with cold, watery-blue eyes and colorless flaxen hair, was to wear blue damask, embroidered around the skirt in palm leaves of seed-pearls.

Arabella, who had a little more bloom, and ventured to call herself a brunette, had chosen pink satin, with cloud-like draperies of black lace; while the matron herself, no bad exemplification of the poet's idea of "fat, fair, and forty," was to wear ruby velvet, richly trimmed with *point-applique* lace, and a diamond cross, which, in the absence of her husband, she had hired from an accommodating jeweler for this occasion.

While Violet—poor, heart-broken child!—was sent ruth-

lessly to Wimbledon, where Miss Gardiner, the governess, was telegraphed to meet her.

But Miss Gardiner, as it chanced, did not received the message in time, and was not there; and Mr. Herbert Carrington was there!

Violet knew him very well. She had met him several times at home, and Bella Smythson had selected him as the special target for the arrows of her hazel eyes, this season.

Mr. Carrington recognized Violet at once.

"Miss Smythson's little sister, isn't it?" said he.

Violet furtively whisked away her tears, and answered: "Yes."

"Is anything the matter?" said Mr. Carrington. "Can I be of service? Pray command me, if——"

"If you could please take me home!" said eager Violet. "Very slyly, indeed, mind, because I've been sent back to boarding-school before the holidays are out, just because Julia and Bella and mamma consider me too young to be at the ball they are going to give."

"This is a serious trouble, indeed," said Mr. Carrington, laughing.

"Oh, it is, indeed!" sighed Violet. "I am sixteen, you know, and I should so like to be a young lady like Julia and Bella! But, you see," returning to the subject, "Miss Gardiner is not here to receive me, and if you would please take me back in your carriage, I could creep in by the area-gate, and perhaps—perhaps I shall be at the ball after all—— But," her large dark eyes suddenly blazing into indignation, "you are laughing at me!"

"Not laughing at you, Miss Effingham," he hastened to explain, "only with you!"

"Miss Effingham!"

Violet's heart leaped at this first delicious tribute to her young-ladyhood. She felt a little frightened, though when, Mr. Carrington, having escorted her back to London by the first train, brought her in a Hansom to Lowndes Square.

"Leave me at the corner, please," said Violet. "It would never do for mamma and the girls to see me in a cab with you. And Bella would be so vexed."

And so the wild little gypsy stole in at the area-gate, and bribed the cook with a kiss not to betray her surreptitious re-entrance into the family circle, while Mr. Carrington went home to wonder what there was so fascinating in Violet Effingham's round, dimpled face and liquid, dark eyes.

"A child, indeed!" he said to himself. "She is a woman, and a dangerously lovely woman, too—only she doesn't know it. Eyes like pools of deep garnet-brown; hair all

glittering like tangles of sunshine! Little Violet, if you could only see yourself as others see you, you might be tempted to be vain. I shall make a point of attending Mrs. Effingham's ball, and if she is not there I shall certainly inquire for her."

The pink satin dress vindicated Mme. Chaussau's fame as an artistic dressmaker; the blue damask came home in time to be tried on and pronounced "perfect," on Saturday night; and on Monday the Misses Smythson dressed themselves with judicious care, and many lavings with rose-water and continuous applications of pearl-cream and blush-pink.

The drawing-rooms, decorated with hot-house flowers, and illuminated, not with vulgar gas, but with the white luster of many wax candles in myriad-branched candelabra, had been personally inspected by Mrs. Effingham before she went to make her toilet, and the little room at the back, where her husband ordinarily kept his boots, and overcoats, and pipes, had been transformed into a garlanded bower, where faint lights glowed through shades of Nile-green glass, and the most elegant and æsthetic refreshments were arranged in *cloisonnee* enameled ware, trays of *repoussee* silver, and baskets of Dresden china.

And just at the time when Arabella was saying to her sister, "How do I look, dear?" and Julia was twisting herself into the shape of the letter S, to see the back of her false puffs and plaitings in the mirror, little Violet was enthusiastically tossing about the contents of an old cedar chest in the lumber-room, which contained the long-forgotten wardrobe of the first Mrs. Effingham.

"Oh!" she cried, "this is beautiful!" and she unfolded a scented robe of long China crape, crimped like the shingly bars of the finest sea-sand, and embroidered in fantastic figures of scarlet silk. "I'll wear this!"

"But it is so odd and old fashioned, miss," said Louisa, the maid.

"That is the very charm of it!" pronounced Violet. "Oh, do make haste, Louisa, with my hair! Are you sure you can do it like the plate in the fashion-book?"

Mrs. Effingham was still arranging the folds of the point-lace over her shoulders, when Julia rushed up-stairs.

"Mamma, Bella!" she cried, "who is the lady down-stairs?"

"The lady down-stairs!" repeated both mother and daughter, in amazement.

"Receiving Mr. Carrington in our drawing-room!" cried breathless Julia. "In the loveliest dead-white dress, brocaded in scarlet silk, and long, golden hair, braided with antique Roman pearls."

"My dear," said Mrs. Effingham, "you must be crazy!"

And both she and Arabella hurried down-stairs, just in time to see the beautiful young intruder courtesy a gracious geeting to two of the most aristocratic and exclusive of the *jeunesse doree* of the world of fashion.

"Ah!" said Violet, with the utmost self-possession, "here is mamma now, and my sisters. Don't move, Mr. Carrington," she added, in a lower tone, "I'm quite safe now. Mamma won't dare to scold me before company."

And Mrs. Effingham and the Misses Smythson were forced to digest their rage and mortification as best they could.

For Violet outshone them as a real, crimson-hearted rose outshiues the milliner's false presentiment—as the diamond outshines the wretched paste ornament—and they knew it but too well.

But success excuses everything, and Mrs. Effingham could not but perceive that the quaint young beauty, in the antique dress, was emphatically a success.

"Violet," she cried, when she found an opportunity, "how dared you play us such a trick?"

"I did it for fun, mamma," said Violet, "and if you scold me I shall tell Mr. Carrington. It was he that brought me back from Wimbledon, and he is my friend."

"I never heard anything so insolent in all my life," cried Arabella, turning pale with anger.

"She ought to be locked up for a week on bread and water," said Julia, passionately.

But Violet only arched her brows and smiled.

For the child had bloomed out into a woman. Violet had discovered her own talisman of power.

They could none of them ever scold or tyrannize over her again. She had no more fears of being sent back to boarding-school.

But Miss Arabella Smythson could hardly conceal her spite the next day when Mr. Carrington called and asked for Violet, nor when bouquets, with cards attached, kept arriving for Violet.

"Mamma," she said, "what is to be done?"

"Nothing that I can see," said Mrs. Effingham, dryly. "The child can't help being a beauty, I suppose."

"She will have to go everywhere with us now," said Julia, plaintively.

"I tried my best to keep her back," sighed Mrs. Effingham; "but she has precipitated herself into society."

And pretty Violet Effingham reigned the belle of the season, and, in the spring, Mr. Carrington asked her father for her hand in marriage. The honest man stared in amazement.

"I—I thought it was Arabella you fancied!" said he. "I knew she liked you!"

"I am too much honored," said Mr. Carrington, without changing a feature; "but I have never aspired to that honor."

"Oh!" said Mr. Effingham. "Well, suit yourself—suit yourself!"

And so, before she was quite seventeen, Violet was married, and Arabella and Julia had the field all to themselves.

But they were not satisfied, after all. Some people never are satisfied.

[THE END.]

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